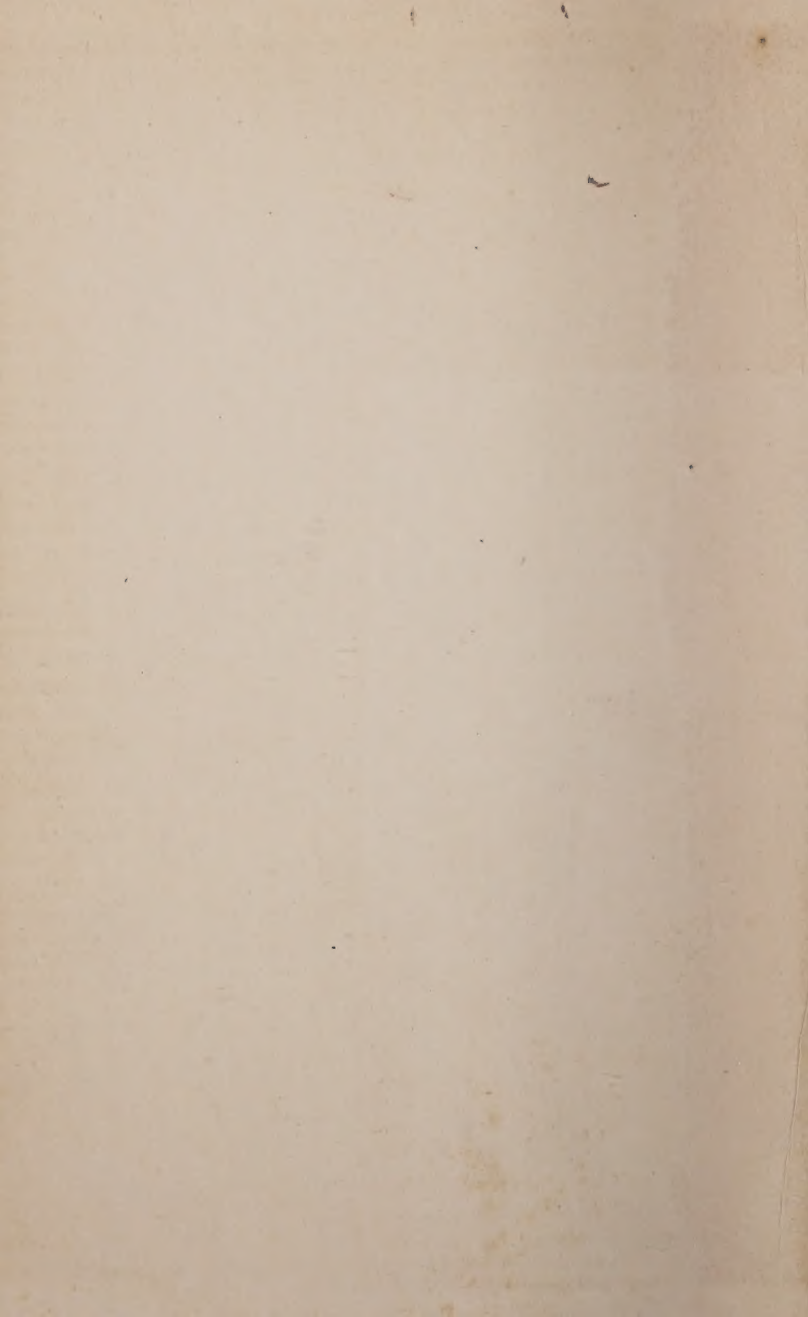




Senator Bruce delighted me the other
day by telling me that he thought
my collection of short stories,
"The Painted City" was as good as O. Henry.

January 30/28.

Sincerely yours
Peter Macdonald

Mrs. J. Green

The
PAINTED CITY

DRY-POINTS OF WASHINGTON LIFE

BY
MARY BADGER WILSON



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TO
E. H. W.
WHOSE SPIRIT IS
BRAVE AND BEAUTIFUL



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FOREWORD

Washington, to the casual observer, seems a romantic place—a spacious city where glittering events find a background of beauty. Literary interpretation of the city has confined itself to colorful tales of diplomatic adventure, political intrigue, or historic pageantry.

One has, perhaps, to live in Washington to find what a sallow city it is, beneath its painted cheek. A brief inspection will not discover the artifice. But living in and with it, one learns that it is singularly bloodless, this painted city. The life of its people is perniciously anemic. A city of employees—no matter how high-sounding their titles may be. A city where nobody takes a chance. A city of fear.

In the following pages, I have put together tales of typical Washingtonians. That the stories are fictional does not dilute the truth that is in them. Although they concern themselves each with a different character, they none the less form a unit. Each one of them tells a part of the story of Washington, but only when considered as a whole can they attempt to tell the whole story.

STATIC

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STATIC

Ruth Tennant came to Washington when that timid city was drunk with the synthetic gin of vicarious adventure. The city's streets were crowded with swivel-chair soldiers and with fur-coated, silk-stockinged "war workers." The air was never empty of the martial echo of a brass band, the red-white-and-blue flutter of a silken flag. Everybody worked and slept and ate in overcrowded rooms and nobody had space enough to put an emotion aside to cool.

Ruth was a stenographer in one of the war bureaus. She had come to Washington from a dusty, gray town in Illinois, where the Mayor claimed a population of seven thousand but the census-takers only conceded six; and since graduating from high-school she had worked in old Jed Wilkinson's store, nine hours a day at eight dollars a week.

As a war worker she got a beginner's salary of a hundred a month, which was further increased by a bonus granted by Congress. It seemed to her a small fortune, even though Washington profiteers confiscated the greater part of it.

In hours of slack business, back in Jed Wilkinson's dry-goods store, she had read greedily all the second-rate fiction magazines, and she had absorbed the cheap, superficial modernism which smeared their pages. It was a futile sort of modernism, rubbed over the face of social custom like a dab of orange rouge. In common with most of its exponents, Ruth Tennant would have been shocked at a serious liberalism which might thrust an exploring surgical knife into the very body of social structure.

Washington in war mood was thoroughly convincing to Ruth's fiction-fed mind. Its casual and multiple social contacts seemed to her stimulatingly cosmopolitan; its crowded confusion fed her faith in her own importance as a war worker; its patriotic phrases thrilled her romantic soul.

She was swept along by the strong tide of mob emotionalism and had all the exhilaration of rid-

ing the crest of the wave. She was fairly efficient in her work and had a humorless belief in its importance. The war bureau in which she served had a particularly complex clerical system; each letter that she wrote had to be initialed by a series of officers, of ascending rank, before it could be signed. In the afternoons, when she would check up these initials on her batch of letters, two vivid spots of color would flare across her cheek-bones. She was enormously impressed with the seriousness of her job. She always looked eager and excited and she walked with a jaunty little swagger, like the second lieutenants.

After office hours, she flung herself into the flood of war workers which poured out of the great stone buildings and the temporary, one-story shacks, and inundated the shopping district. Jostled by the crowd, she darted in and out of F Street shops, fingering bargain-counter silk stockings appraisingly; pricing luxurious silks and furs; finally clutching avariciously at some garment she could not afford and dickering with the store manager as to instalment terms. For the first time in her life she patronized a beauty shop and its

ministrations soon became a necessity to her. Every Saturday afternoon she spent hours waiting her turn in the overcrowded "salon," for a marcel, a facial, a manicure.

She had two roommates in the crowded lodging house where she lived. They were war workers too; girls whom she had never seen before this enforced intimacy. The three of them went out every night to dance with men whom they had met casually in their day's work. Usually these men took them to dinner and they counted on this to cut down living expenses. They knew nothing about their escorts except that they wore uniforms and shoulder-straps. But that was considered sufficient. It was one's Patriotic Duty to amuse the men in the Service. The men she went about with seemed to Ruth very much alike,—their names and their faces blurred in her memory. But there was a thrill about all of them. They were so different from the men at home who had no uniforms and no Morale needing to be kept up.

Two of them rather stood out in her thoughts. There was the Phelps boy who really wanted to get to France and who finally did. He wrote Ruth

three letters, badly spelled, sentimental, and thrillingly viséed by the Censor. Then he was killed. For a while Ruth dramatized herself as a war heroine, whose lover had made the Supreme Sacrifice. For a few weeks she even stayed at home in the evenings and re-read her thin batch of letters from the Front. But the illusion wore thin and she craved excitement. So she told the other girls that she knew it was selfish to nurse her grief; that she must "carry on for others"; and she returned to the old routine of feverishness.

Then there was Major Fanning, a short, red-faced man who drew down his heavy brows and pursed his full lips. He called Ruth "child" and "baby" and spent money on her with ostentatious lavishness. He even paid her bills at the ready-to-wear shops, when she got caught in a jam of monthly instalments. This turned out to be a farewell gesture, as he was ordered the next week to one of the southern cantonments, where his wife decided to join him with their three children. These sudden orders, official and domestic, left him scant time for tact in disabusing Ruth of her naïve belief in his altruism. Although it was quite

along the line of the sort of fiction she had been reading for years, yet his swift and extreme frankness shocked her. She wept hysterically because he could think she was "that kind of a girl"; then she flew into a termagant rage and threatened to report him to his superior officers. She did everything except return his check and she could not do that because it had already been cashed by the merchant of whom she had bought her fur coat and her velvet frock and her spangled evening gown.

For months after Major Fanning had gone south, she wore a wistful manner. In the middle of a gay evening she would make her eyes dreamy and would catch her underlip with her teeth in a soft, hurt fashion much used by a movie actress whom she admired. If this "registered" with her escort of the evening, if it drew from him any responsive sympathy, she would confide sadly but vaguely the story of her great disappointment; she would tell him of the man whom she had trusted as "a real pal" and who had "turned out to be just like the rest of you."

She dramatized herself very satisfactorily as a

disillusioned woman of the world and the junior lieutenants with whom she went about were quite impressed by the rôle.

At this period she talked a lot about "pals" and men who knew how to be "good pals." Even while she was working, she would sing soft little snatches from the popular song "Dear Old Pal O' Mine" in her throaty contralto.

The facile emotionalism which foamed from those militaristic days convinced her that she was drinking deep of life.

Then came the Armistice.

A brilliant flare of excitement, the final skyrocket of war. And the dead, burnt-out sticks of routine left in one's hand.

For a while in Washington there was a confusion of exodus which counterfeited the excitement of war. Troops marching away under hurried orders; war workers, dropped from the Government pay-rolls, rushing to get home before the Government ceased to provide transportation; contractors returning to their headquarters to work up claims against the Government for damage done to their business by Peace; lobbyists and

publicity agents scurrying about like hungry rats, seeking new "contacts." In the blind lurches with which Washington staggered back to peace, Ruth and many like her thought they saw a continuance of the mad dance of the two years past. And they clung desperately to the Government pay-roll, clawing one another out of place, digging their finger-nails into whatever job they could get, rather than fall back into the remembered blackness of small-town monotony.

By urgent letters to every one she knew in her home town, Ruth was able to bring sufficient pressure upon her Congressman to make him take up her case. And as Congress had returned a Republican majority, her representative had some little influence. He was able to get her transferred to one of the older Departments, where work was not affected by the cessation of hostilities. She had to accept a little loss of salary—the older Departments had never gone on a war basis—but she was glad to do that. Anything, to stay in this magic town.

It was on a day in late February that her transfer finally went through. That evening, as she cut

through the Mall, hurrying toward a large cafeteria where she sometimes dined when she had no invitation for dinner, she was stopped by the pathos of a fur-clad figure of grief on one of the park benches. It was a mild evening, languid and heavy with unborn spring. Yet this girl was huddled into her fur coat and, even so, seemed to shiver with cold. Just as Ruth passed her bench, a strangled sob came from the crumpled figure. Ruth stopped, a little uncertain. She slipped quietly into a seat at the other end of the bench; after a while she put her hand on the girl's arm and asked, "Is there anything I can do?"

The girl shook her head disconsolately. She felt in her pocket for a handkerchief and turned her face so that Ruth could see it. She must have been a pretty girl, Ruth thought. But her face was mottled now, congested from crying; and there were queer, comic streaks of rouge left from her ruined make-up.

"I've lost my job," she muttered. "I'll have to go back. . . ."

There was unutterable bleakness in that phrase "go back."

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"Is it so terrible at home?" Ruth asked. But her voice was not warm with sympathy. It was thin and harsh with fright. She was thinking of the narrowness of her own escape.

"There's nothing . . . absolutely nothing at home. I'd rather be dead," the girl said.

For a few minutes, Ruth sat there, her hand on the other girl's arm. But presently she glanced at her watch and saw that she must be hurrying if she was to get any kind of choice at the cafeteria. People grabbed up all the best things so early. So she left the girl, with one final, sympathetic pat of the hand. But for a long time she remembered that lonely, huddled figure. It was a sort of symbol of the fate she had evaded. To have to go back . . . !

Her two roommates both lost their jobs. Ruth went to the train to see them off when they left, and something of their gray depression communicated itself to her. Old ties breaking. Already with the departure of her "buddies" as she had jauntily called them, the gay, uniformed days began to smell faintly of lavender. The shadow of finality fell across her spirit.

But next day, things brightened. There was a girl in her new office, a left-over like herself, who wanted a roommate; and together they set out to find a two room and kitchenette apartment. Now that the surplus population was dribbling out, Washington landlords were actually seeking tenants. Prices remained exorbitant, but apartments, hitherto unavailable, could now be had in almost any section of the city.

Ruth was thrilled with the plan for a bachelor-girl apartment, where she and her new-found friend could entertain. She pictured a succession of gay evenings, with just the right "crowd" gathered in the living-room. A becoming lamp . . . vividly colored cushions on the davenport . . . overstuffed furniture.

Again she involved herself deeply with installment payments; this time for furnishing the apartment. And for a while the gay evenings materialized; there were still quite a few of the Service men whom she knew in town. They were hanging to their commissions even as she hung to her job. But one by one they lost out. The gay evenings were separated now by long, arid weeks. The few

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men who were left were harassed and anxious; they were trying to save enough from their last months in the Service to tide them over coming weeks of unemployment. Even when they remembered to look up "Rufus" as they called her, they were preoccupied and very little disposed to "throw a party." The old, spendthrift, careless days were gone.

Often, with her roommate, she drifted downtown to a movie, preferably a picture of Hollywoodian luxury. The two girls came home from these pictures silent and moody. But oftenest they spent the long, aimless evenings yawning over an illustrated magazine or a best-seller, under their rose-shaded lamp. By bedtime, they were petulant and disposed to quarrel over housekeeping trifles.

Another year passed and the Administration changed. A new army of singularly predatory politicians took over the Government. They resented any wisp of glory which might trail from their predecessors' régime, and their orders blotted out even the memory of the war era.

In the Department where she worked, Ruth

had at first hoped to make new friends who should take the places of those who had left Washington. But her hopes were quickly dispelled. With the exception of her own roommate and a few other girls scattered in distant offices, all the clerks in this Department were pre-war workers. In the merry, crowded days of war, she had heard funny stories about the old residents of Washington and how the queer old frumps turned up Puritanic noses at the newcomers. She had even waxed indignant at the lack of patriotism in these residents; at their failure to appreciate the "sacrifices" which the war workers were making to save the nation. And of course she had laughed at the explosive letters which "Pro Bono Publico" and "Washingtonian" were constantly writing to the newspapers about the indecent dress, the shocking behavior, the extravagance of the war workers. But now, for the first time, she came in actual contact with the thin-lipped conservatism of the pre-war Government clerk.

At first, they all seemed to her to be very old. But afterwards she decided that their age was more a matter of manner and dress than of years.

The women were neat but not decorative; and they measured the length of her skirts and the lowness of her neck lines with cold eyes. The men were, most of them, slouchy and unpressed and looked harassed.

Office conversation turned chiefly on work and office politics. The only personal gossip was about fellow workers who had had misfortune or illness. "However will she manage to meet those awful doctor's bills, my dear! Don't you think we had best get up a subscription?" or "Under the Retirement Act, poor old Mr. Jones will have to drop out and how he can live on a pension of sixty dollars a month, with that worthless son to support, I do not see!" It was all horribly depressing. Nobody talked about parties or the new dance steps or theaters or good-looking men.

Day by day her life was being devoured by that inevitable, gray monster of Washington—Monotony. Sometimes she felt so desperate that she had to put her hand over her mouth to keep from shrieking with hysteria. But when she would look about her to see if she had actually made any sound, all the clerks in the room would be steadily

at work, making meticulous entries on neat index cards with their fine-pointed pens. She came to hate them eventually, as any rebellious prisoner hates the trusties.

Her work was uninteresting and difficult. She had to take dictation from Mr. Koenig, who had an office reputation for rudeness and sarcasm. Although he was the chief of the division, Ruth did not attain to secretarial dignity. She simply reported to him whenever his bell rang, took dictation, and then returned to the big room where her typewriter was placed between the desks of two clerical workers. The letters were very dull and sometimes her attention wandered while Mr. Koenig dictated, so that later she would be unable to transcribe her notes correctly. Then her copy would be returned to her and attached to it an ironical note, written in Mr. Koenig's small, careful script.

In the afternoons she found herself unreasonably tired but she never went home to rest. As long as the shops remained open, she rushed feverishly up and down F Street, pricing things, trying on, selecting with a final, weary indiffer-

ence. After all, what did it matter? She was beginning to feel the futility of bodily ritual. All the astringents and creams and perfumes; all the soft silken undergarments and the daring outer garments—what were they for?

Once, though, Mr. Koenig noticed a new perfume that she wore. It was rather an insistent perfume, very sweet. As she bent over him to point out an alteration in the paragraphing of a letter, he suddenly put the letter down on the desk and looked up at her. She noticed that his grayish face was flushed and that there was an odd something about his eyes.

"That's awfully sweet cologne you have on," he said.

Ruth found that she was flushing too. It had been so long since any man had said anything personal to her. And that it should be Mr. Koenig—cold, ironic, feared. Ruth thought how astonished all the people in the office would be. She decided that she would mention it casually to that catty old Miss Harris. Suddenly she felt thrilled, excited. . . .

But Mr. Koenig picked up his letter and was

thereafter very businesslike. He did not again revert to the subject of cologne.

The crowds which she had loved so in the war years were now drained of stimulation. In them, as in a cracked, disillusioning mirror, she saw herself over and over again. In the aisles of every shop, she passed hundreds of other left-overs like herself; women just past their first youth, overdressed, over-rouged, dissatisfied, seeking. . . . They were all preparing ceaselessly for something that never happened. That was the worst of it, the utter stagnation.

One winter she got season tickets for a series of concerts. She heard a great violinist, a distinguished pianist, a Metropolitan soprano. But she had never had the spiritual discipline which would have enabled her to understand the brave, human victory of such music as this. All about her she saw tired, bleak faces—such faces as she saw every day in her office life. She felt a contempt for the audience because, she thought, they were content to accept this pale music as a substitute for life. On a perverse impulse of rebellion, she left the theater in the middle of the third con-

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cert and tore up all the remaining tickets for the series.

The summers were the worst. Washington was unspeakable in the summertime. Brazen skies; soft, hot asphalt underfoot; layers of hot, dead steam to breathe. And always the same tired crowds pouring from the glaring white buildings when afternoon had dragged its weighted feet to the hour of half-past four.

She had lived through three summers since her life had boiled down to an existence—three separate hells. And now a fourth was starting, although it was still Maytime and should have been spring. The early heat was unfortunate because a big Shriners' Convention was meeting in the city. Day after day the poor wretches, upholstered in plush like old-fashioned parlor furniture, had to drag their tired, scorched feet over the melting pavements in endless parades.

Ruth drifted downtown on the first evening of the Convention to see the lights which had been strung across the Avenue and to watch the procession with all the elaborate floats. Her roommate was away for a few days, so Ruth was alone.

But she felt almost happy. The uniforms about the streets, even though they were not military, gave her spirit a reminiscent lift. And there was a heartiness, a cordiality about the visitors that broke through Washington's dull indifference. Ruth found herself hurrying, pushing against the crowd, eager to see. She wedged herself into a tightly packed group at an advantageous corner and stood on tip-toe to get a glimpse of a gay float. Suddenly the man in front of her turned about to leave and she saw that it was Mr. Koenig. She forgot her fear of him, her office attitude.

"Isn't this fun?" she laughed. She was very pretty with this eagerness upon her.

As once before, she saw a flush rise in Mr. Koenig's face, and something excited and greedy in his eyes.

"Here, take my place. You can see better," he said and pushed Ruth in front of him. He kept his hands on her soft, coolly powdered arms.

After a while there came a little sameness in the parade and he suggested that they move further up the Avenue where there was a space set apart for a street carnival. He bought confetti

for Ruth and a gayly colored paper duster. They pushed into a crowded ice-cream place and got cold drinks. She could hardly believe that this was the same Mr. Koenig who sent back her letters to be re-written and who terrorized all the clerks who worked for him. He was so queerly excited. He was even a little foolish, like all habitually stiff people when they unbend.

At eleven o'clock he took her home and when they got there, she invited him to come in.

"There's some ginger ale in the refrigerator," she said. "You ought to have a cold drink before you go."

He accepted, a little self-consciously. Ruth gave him the big, deep chair under the rose-shaded lamp, while she cracked ice for the ginger ale and emptied the last of a box of cookies into the prettiest of her plates. It was good to have a man to make a party for, even if the man were only Mr. Koenig and the party nothing but ginger ale and rather stale cookies.

"You are nicely fixed here," Mr. Koenig said heavily, as he sipped his chilled drink. Ruth no-

ticed that he drank slowly, delicately, like a woman.

"Yes. I have a roommate, of course. But she is away just now. Her mother was sick and she had to go home. She's Miss Westcott—from our office, you know."

"Oh. . . . Yes."

His manner had grown stiff again, almost awkward. But that queer excitement persisted in his eyes.

"She will be away for some little time?" he asked Ruth.

"No. Just a few days, I think."

"Oh. . . . I see."

He got up and placed his empty glass on the table. But for a few minutes he made no move to go. Then:

"How about to-morrow evening? Would you like to go to the Carnival again?" he asked.

"I'd love to," Ruth told him.

"Then suppose I come around about dinner time. We can have dinner together and have a long evening afterwards."

Ruth persuaded herself that it was an adven-

ture. She deliberately forgot how dull and disagreeable Mr. Koenig had always been; she deliberately remembered that he was the office terror. She thought of him as a strong, cruel man who was finding himself fascinated now by a woman. And she was the woman. The thing that made it the more of an adventure was the fact that he was married and that all the women in her office—the women whom she hated for their resignation to life—would be shocked.

She hurried to the shops the next afternoon and bought a new dress, a rose pink organdy cut very low at the throat, cut very short in the skirt. There was some point to shopping, now.

They had a pleasant enough dinner in one of the smaller hotels and Ruth tried not to notice how carefully he estimated the tip; tried not to compare this with dinners in the old spendthrift days of war.

The Carnival was very much like the Carnival of the previous night; they returned to Ruth's apartment a little earlier.

On the third night they decided to spend the evening at home.

People at the office began to talk. Several of the clerks had seen them together during the week of the Shriners' Convention. And Mr. Koenig was a little drunk with this draught of youth which he had taken on a long-empty stomach. He grew careless. He rang constantly for Ruth to come for dictation, and yet clerks who found business to take them to his room, reported that he was not dictating.

Then Mrs. Koenig discovered in his pockets an absurdly ardent letter and she descended upon the office, panoplied in righteous indignation. She was a big-boned, hard-lipped woman who belonged to many women's clubs and was known as a first-rate organizer. Evidently she had thought out this situation and was going to be quite practical and efficient about it. She went direct to the Head of the Bureau, her husband's immediate superior. And she demanded that he have both her husband and Miss Tennant brought before him.

The Head of the Bureau looked nervous, almost frightened. He was a political appointee who was notoriously ignorant of the work of his

office. He was obliged to depend on Koenig, the most capable of his Division chiefs. Every one knew that Koenig ran the Bureau. This was certainly a devilish awkward situation. Just what to say to Koenig . . .

He need not have worried. At the first sight of his wife, Koenig sobered into middle-age. This little . . . ah, episode was regrettable. He ought never to have made such a mistake. But a man could not break the ties of a lifetime . . . he could not throw away a reputation which he had laboriously built. Divorce? He answered his wife's sharp, clear question. No, of course he didn't want a divorce. Great drops of perspiration ran down his temples, as he thought nervously of alimony and his small, careful investments.

"Well, then. . . ." Mrs. Koenig looked toward the Head of the Bureau, significantly. He cleared his throat. His manner had grown more assured as the difficulty seemed to clear.

"I think Mr. Koenig has been overworked—he is nervously overwrought—not wholly responsible," he said. "We will arrange for him to take a vacation, er . . . a short vacation. Mr. Koenig

is valuable. We can't spare him long. We will let it be known in the office that he has had a slight nervous breakdown. Then after a while—say, a month—he will be back with us, fit as a fiddle again.”

He beamed upon Mrs. Koenig as he developed his idea. Mrs. Koenig's answering smile had certain reservations. She glanced toward Ruth who sat silent.

As she watched her great Adventure collapse like one of the Carnival balloons, as she watched Mr. Koenig shrink from a strong, cruel man to a small, frightened Government clerk, Ruth felt a white anger spread through her body. Anger at life which cheated. Anger at youth which supplied desire with nothing to feed it.

“Now, as for Miss Tennant—” the Head of the Bureau was speaking again. “I fear we shall have to dispense with Miss Tennant's services. She is not just the sort of young woman that we like to have on our clerical force. Miss Tennant's dismissal will be immediate. It will be ‘for the good of the service.’ ”

Mrs. Koenig nodded her head three times with slow satisfaction.

Then Ruth's anger flew into a termagant rage, such a rage as she had vented years ago on Major Fanning when he had thought she was "that kind of a girl." She was not really angry with Mrs. Koenig, nor with Mrs. Koenig's husband, not even with the Bureau Chief. But all her passionate resentment of dulness and inevitability and disillusion—forces which were so maddeningly intangible—turned itself upon these puppets whom she *could* physically strike and hurt.

Finally, two strong men carried her kicking and screaming from the mahogany-fitted office of the Head of the Bureau, hurried her downstairs and hastily summoned a taxi. They saw her safely home and left her there, a discharged Government employee.

But for many months the echo of her words and of her actual blows broke the decorous drabness of office life in the Division where she had worked.

Her roommate helped her to pack her trunk, weeping all the while. Ruth did not cry. She

attended to all her preparations with a tired indifference. Her anger had congealed to a cold hatred of God. God had never seemed to her very personal; faith had never been a reality in her life. But now she identified as God all the blind forces which had wiped the color from the face of life.

When she got home, she told her family that she had lost her job and could get nothing else to do in Washington. They were not very curious about it. For a brief while, when the war fever burned, they had been quite proud of Ruth. But all that was forgotten now. A job in Washington was simply a job. And, besides, their family relationships had always been pretty casual.

Dinner—her first home dinner in six years—was a silent meal. Once or twice her father asked her a question about business in Washington, and her brother said something about the baseball team.

After dinner, her two sisters and her brother went off to keep engagements they had made. It was a hot evening and Ruth felt stifled in the little

box house; she decided that the front porch would be more endurable, although it was unscreened from mosquitoes. Her mother presently joined her there. Her father was indoors, working with the radio.

The chair in which her mother rocked methodically had a sharp squeak. Ruth looked at the chair; it was surely a different porch rocker from the one they used to have, and yet it had the very same squeak.

Mosquitoes bit her ankles and she slapped viciously at them with an inadequate handkerchief.

Once her father came to the door and looked up at the hot stars.

"Getting anything good, Pa?" Mrs. Tennant asked.

"No," he said. "Nothing seems to come clear. Static's pretty bad."

"Better come out and cool off a while," Mrs. Tennant suggested. "Not that it's cool anywhere, though. Air's so thick, seems like you could stir it with a spoon."

Mr. Tennant wiped his damp hands on his dingy handkerchief.

"No. Guess I'll try again. Might get something," he said, and went indoors.

From the porch of the house across the road, Ruth caught the occasional light of a cigarette. She wondered who was living there now but was too indifferent to ask.

"I wouldn't be surprised if maybe Jed Wilkinson would take you back in the store," her mother said.

"Maybe," Ruth agreed without interest.

The cigarette spark left the porch of the opposite house, moved down the pathway to the gate and off up the road.

"Tom Brassher," her mother commented.

"Oh. The Basshers still live there?" Ruth asked.

"Yes. Tom went to the war, you remember. Went to France and all. He got three different kinds of medals. But he's all to pieces now."

For a minute Ruth made no comment. Then the last phrase reached her dimmed mind, like an echo.

"All to pieces. What do you mean?" she said.

"I mean he spends his time playing craps with

that low crowd that hangs out back of Ed Bailey's crossroad store and he's always half drunk with bootleg whiskey. That's how he makes his living—bootlegging. Least, so everybody says. Funny, ain't it, when he's been to such grand places and seen such grand things, that he could come down to the crossroads crowd. Hard to understand how a man that's been up so high and had all those medals 'n everything, could come down so low, ain't it now?"

Ruth's dull eyes followed the slouching figure of Tom Brassher as he trudged through the hot dust, toward the crossroad.

"Oh, I don't know," she said.

FLU

FLU

Jim Darrow thought himself pretty lucky to get in at "Ma Gentry's." His friend Neil Taylor worked it for him; otherwise he could not have managed it because Ma Gentry had a long waiting list. She was only "Ma" behind her straight, black-satin back. If one were facing her tired eyes, her frizzed and faded bangs, her proud, high-bridged nose, one addressed her as "Mrs. Gentry." And one infused one's voice and manner with deference. That is, if one had a weakness for waffles and fried chicken and Sally Lunn and strawberry shortcake. Because the price of these commodities at Ma's was deference. She had never learned how to charge Washington prices and she was always willing to wait for her money if any of "her boys" were hard up. But deference she did demand.

"Mr. Gentry has had reverses," she would explain, "and so we are temporarily in straightened circumstances. That is why I find it necessary to take a few paying guests. But we are very par-

THE PAINTED CITY

ticular about the people we take into our home. They must be 'to the manor born.' "

Neil Taylor treated her with an exaggerated courtesy, accented after the manner of the French. Whenever she entered a room where he was sitting, he arose, clicked his heels together and bowed from the waist. He pulled back her chair at the head of the table with the air of one serving a "duke and a duchess's daughter." And he had even been known to lift the tips of her work-worn fingers to his lips.

This worried Darrow; he was afraid she would see that Neil was making fun of her and he had a shamed-faced consciousness that it was rather shabby to ridicule the old girl while one was growing fat off the second helpings she pressed upon her "paying guests."

But when he protested to Neil, Neil only laughed.

"Gosh," he said, "you needn't fear that I'll ever smear it on too thick for Ma. It can't be done. If she had any notion of the difference between real goods and counterfeit, d'you think she'd be supporting that lazy loafer of a husband? Any

time you think I'm overplaying my part, just take a squint at Pa!"

Mr. Gentry was indeed conclusive proof of Ma's credulity. In marriage, as in religion, she was a sound Fundamentalist and she accepted the legend of Mr. Gentry's "important work" with the same unquestioning faith that she accorded to the story of Eve and the serpent. She deferred always to his opinions and she quoted him as a devout Jew might quote from the Talmud. Her weak, pale eyes openly worshiped whenever they rested on his tall figure, wrapped in a long black coat and a heavy air of preoccupation, Senatorial model.

"Mr. Gentry looks so like a member of Congress. He is often taken for one by strangers," she would say with prideful satisfaction.

"Very like a member of Congress," Jim Darrow always agreed with her, thinking viciously—

"Lady, you've said a mouthful."

For Darrow viewed Congress from the press gallery and he knew that Mr. Gentry was a fitting symbol of that body's spurious greatness.

There had been a time, just after he had arrived

from the provinces, when he had expected to find intellectual distinction among the Representatives of the People. That had been five years ago. Five years in the press gallery and five years in Washington's whispering gallery, had left him with few expectations and no faith.

None of the boarders had ever been able to find out just what "important work" engaged the energies of Mr. Gentry. They only knew that he set forth from the house each morning exactly at ten o'clock, after an hour's leisurely perusal of the Post.

"It is necessary for me to keep in touch with national affairs," he explained his newspaper addiction, and Mrs. Gentry carefully guarded his morning hour from interruption.

"My husband is so well informed," she would boast, "I have been greatly privileged in my lifetime. My dear father was a delightful conversationalist and Mr. Gentry is his equal if not his superior. There is nothing so instructive and elevating, I think, as the conversation of gentlemen when they are *au courant* with world affairs."

But Mr. Gentry did not acquire his political

knowledge from newspaper columns alone. He got most of it from first-hand observation. Whenever the Vice-President tapped his gavel for the Senate to come to order, Mr. Gentry could be seen in his accustomed place, at the end of the front row in one of the public galleries. Although this seat was officially free to the first comer, it was practically reserved for Mr. Gentry. A good-natured doorkeeper always herded the early tourists into other sections of the gallery until "Old Faithful," as he knew Mr. Gentry, came to take possession of his favorite post of observation.

In the press gallery, they knew Mr. Gentry as "Colonel Carter" because he belonged so distinctly to the type which Washington recognizes as the "professional southerner"; and they set their watches by his arrival on the senatorial scene.

Whenever a debate was in progress, he was observed to take copious notes in a fatly important red leather book which he drew from an inner pocket.

"A chiel's amang ye takin' notes," Druse of the Tribune would mutter when the red leather book emerged. Druse was full of Victorian quotations.

When the Senate was not sitting, Mr. Gentry spent his time at the Congressional Library. There he had arranged that an alcove should be assigned to him for research work, and he would sit for hours poring over heavy volumes of collected speeches, Websterian vintage; or he would copy patiently long passages from Dryden and Pope and Goldsmith.

Darrow was fairly sure that he knew the secret of Mr. Gentry's mysterious and "important" work. One morning, when he had walked to the Capitol with Ma's decorative husband, Mr. Gentry had delivered himself of certain opinions on a political question then engaging the attention of the Senate. For informal and ex tempore expression, Mr. Gentry's sentences had been somewhat elaborately phrased and he had spoken them in a full-toned, oratorical voice. Two days later, Darrow had heard the very same opinions, clothed in the very same phrases, delivered on the floor of the Senate in the equally full-toned and oratorical voice of Senator Follinsbee.

On another occasion, just after Senator Follinsbee had made a set speech on a matter of in-

ternational concern, Darrow passing down the corridors of the Senate Office Building on a reportorial errand, had met Pa Gentry emerging from Senator Follinsbee's office. The ceremonial black coat had been buttoned tightly over Mr. Gentry's chest and he had patted a spot in the neighborhood of his heart, as though to make sure that his wallet was safely pocketed. That night there had been fresh flowers on the Gentry table and a reminiscent coyness in Ma's manner as she proudly informed her paying guests that the flowers were a tribute from her romantically devoted husband.

"Mr. Gentry is always so thoughtful about the little attentions which so many men forget," she had said.

And Darrow had learned to connect the floral tributes which from time to time appeared on the long boarding-house table (as well as the authoritative air which Mr. Gentry wore when he was "in funds") with Senator Follinsbee's florid contributions to the Congressional Record. The flowers were never profuse but that was to be expected; pompous men like Senator Follinsbee were usually penurious.

One of the little attentions about which Mr. Gentry was so punctilious was the putting on of his wife's rubbers. On rainy mornings, before she went out on her marketing errands, he always knelt before her in the dark, narrow front hall and adjusted her rubber shoes with a nice gallantry. It was a tableau which interested Darrow; the elderly gallant kneeling before the drab, tired woman; the shabbiness of her dress, the shapelessness of the big market basket which hung over her arm, and the shining pride in her faded eyes! He sometimes wondered just how typical it was of her sex thus to value the outward and visible sign of an affection which could offer little inward and spiritual grace.

Twelve and fourteen hours a day, Ma Gentry's patient feet plodded along the uninteresting paths of wholesale housekeeping. Her boarders were all men and there was a waiting list of applicants. But women would not have cared for the house. Women would have wanted cretonne curtains and modern, graceful furniture shinningly veneered; they would never have tolerated the heavy, old-fashioned double beds, the ugly bureaus, and the

preposterous wash-stands which furnished each of the rooms. Men, on the contrary, liked the friendly shabbiness of it. They liked the tolerance that permitted them to spill ashes on the floor and to burn cigarette holes in the funny old bureau covers; above all, they liked the plentiful, well-seasoned food, served without fripperies.

There was one kind-hearted youngster from the West who worried about Ma's impractical hospitality.

"Why, you'll never make any money, the way you run this place, Mrs. Gentry," he told her. "All these second helpings and even third helpings"—he looked meaningly at Neil Taylor's heaped plate—"and special invalid food for anybody that has a finger ache! Why, you ought to make us pay for extras. Believe me, you are the only person in this town that's giving anything away."

Ma did not like his solicitude. She drew herself up rather stiffly as she answered him.

"I could never bring myself to haggle over a dollar," she said. "I have been reared with different traditions."

Most of the men who boarded at the house were newspaper correspondents who found it convenient to be so close to the Capitol. Ma loved to talk to them about "public affairs" as she always called the political crap game played at Washington. She especially liked to tell about the old days when her grandfather had been in Congress and her grandmother had lived in Washington. To special favorites, like Neil Taylor, she sometimes showed her precious heirlooms—the beautifully carved silver snuff-box that had belonged to the Colonial governor; the letter from General Washington to her Revolutionary ancestor; the yellowed silk dress which her grandmother had worn to a White House Ball; Confederate bonds in which her father had sunk his modest fortune.

Once Darrow, thinking to give her pleasure, managed to pull some political wires and secure for her an invitation to a White House reception. On the day when she received it, she watched for Darrow to come home, and beckoned him into her small, private sitting-room. Her cheeks were pink and her eyes distressed.

"Mr. Taylor told me that you were instrumental in having this White House invitation sent to me," she said. "Oh, dear Mr. Darrow, I trust that you will not think me ungracious. I hope that you will understand. . . ."

She broke off nervously. It was very hard for her to be even apparently discourteous.

"You see," she finally managed, "in my part of the country we really don't know Republicans socially. I remember when dear old Bishop Capehart's son went over to the Republicans, how difficult it was for us. The Bishop's son, you know! And yet we could not condone his act. Personally, I always crossed the street when I saw him approaching, so that I would not have to speak to him."

Darrow was beginning to see light. He had been completely puzzled by her embarrassed distress.

"I think I understand, Mrs. Gentry," he reassured her. "You feel that you would rather not accept the hospitality of a Republican President?"

"Yes. Yes. It's just that, exactly. I'm so *glad*

that you understand. And I do trust that you know how appreciative I am of your courtesy. Indeed, I shall put the invitation away with dear Grandmother's things. Even though I can't accept it, it will be nice to have it, with the pretty gold eagle on it and everything."

For weeks afterward, she continued to placate Darrow by all sorts of special attentions. Neil Taylor, to whom he told the story, was enormously amused.

"Did you imagine that any one survived who took the party bunk seriously?" he asked.

"How she can live in this town and still believe anything is what gets me!" Darrow exclaimed irritably.

Something had been getting on Darrow's nerves. He did not know whether it was the oil scandals or the muggy weather, typical of Washington. The oil mess was the rottenest piece of business that had come to light since he had been a Washington correspondent and he cordially hated the part he was called upon to play. The paper which he represented, like most of the news-

papers throughout the country, was pledged to a hushing-up policy. It had been decided by the political strategists that the best thing to do was to do nothing; to sit tight and by clever sophistry to persuade the people generally that all charges of corruption were inspired by political partisanship. Darrow's paper was thoroughly committed to this line and it was up to Darrow to twist the Washington news accordingly. It was not a very inspiring job.

Neil Taylor was of the opinion that old Darrow was getting to be an "awful crab." This judgment was based on a diatribe delivered by Darrow when Neil made the inoffensive remark:

"Politicians make me sick!"

"Well, they've got nothing on us," Darrow had exploded. "Talk about the freedom of the press and all that bunk, it's a joke, the damnedest joke I know. What makes *me* sick is the way we newspaper men are always thanking our shabby gods we're not like the politicians. Well, we aren't like 'em. Because they pull the strings and we do the dancing. Some of us are so cheap we can

be bought with a cup of tea and a cake! A ride down the river on an official yacht or a bid to a cabinet party—specially if they ask the missus—and we are ready to lick the polish off their boots. The worst of it is we get away with it. People believe the rot we write, that is people outside of this damned town believe it.”

“Well, there are a few who break loose,” Neil conciliated.

“Yes, a few. And what happens to them? Treated like Ishmaelites. Not allowed at the White House news fests. Can’t talk over the radio. Shut off from all the news tips. And then we talk about freedom of the press and the traditions of the profession! Hell of a profession.” Darrow jammed his hat down on his head and slammed the door on his departing sentence:

“On a par with the oldest profession in the world, I’d say.”

“Take your soap box with you,” Neil called after him.

Yes, undoubtedly things were getting on Darrow’s nerves. For a while he thought it was the oil mess. Then he thought that it was the

weather. Finally he decided that he was sick. There was a good bit of flu about town.

"And I've got it," he told himself.

This was the day his paper telegraphed him to get an interview with a cabinet officer, newly involved in the scandals.

Darrow's head throbbed with a dull, persistent pain. His legs felt weak and unreliable; he had a strange suspicion that they might take him off in another direction from the one he intended to follow. Every few minutes the earth rocked alarmingly beneath his feet.

But he kept his appointment with the cabinet officer. That gentleman could only spare him a few minutes. He had to keep a social engagement, and his wife was waiting for him. She stood over by a window, her softly gloved fingers tapping impatiently on the window-pane. She was a woman plainly unaccustomed to waiting.

The cabinet official began with a deprecatory laugh at the absurd situation in which he was involved. He swiftly changed to a blustering manner as he opened his counter offensive against his accusers who were merely "playing politics."

Darrow had begun to take desultory notes but he put the notebook wearily away as the interview developed.

"Aren't you taking this down?" the great man asked sharply.

"Oh, I know the line," Darrow answered. He was too sick to be respectful.

He dispatched the interview by telegraph and decided to call it a day.

"I ought to get to bed," he muttered.

When he got off the street-car, he was too dizzy to proceed. He stopped in a small, triangular park and sat down on one of the benches.

"I shouldn't be sitting here. It's still chilly under all this muffling spring," he thought, and shivered. But he could not find the strength immediately to get on his feet. A group of tourists passed his bench. They carried guide books in their hands and in their eyes was the fixed, sight-seeing gaze.

"My, it's a pretty city," one of them said reverently.

Darrow pondered this with a sick seriousness. He looked at the Maxfield Parrish sky, the sun-

drenched, golden avenues, the budding green of the park in which he sat. And it seemed to him that it was all painted on a stage scene. Washington had only two dimensions; the third dimension was lacking. The beauty of the place was obvious but it was unreal.

"That's it," he decided. "It's a painted city."

To his sick mind, the decision seemed weighty.

Finally, he dragged himself up and made his way home to Ma Gentry's. When Ma saw him, she was flutteringly alarmed. She felt his pulse and held the palm of her hand against his throbbing temples to test his fever.

"You must go right to bed," she said, "and I am going to call a doctor."

Darrow was in no mood to protest.

He lay in a feverish stupor, while she put hot-water bags at his feet and arranged on a bedside table all the paraphernalia which the doctor would expect—a fresh glass of water in which to rinse his clinical thermometer, a fresh towel for drying it, a teaspoon and an empty glass. She was quite happy with the ritual of invalidism.

Darrow fell into a dream-ridden sleep. He

thought that he had died and had gone to hell. He was hot and thirsty and hell was a confusion of ugly noises. Then he could see an angel leaning over the bar of heaven. The bar was made of shining gold and the angel's wings were bathed in sunlight. The angel called to him:

"Are you thirsty?"

The angelic words had a soft slur and a southern intonation like Ma Gentry's voice. He looked again and the angel *was* Ma Gentry. She was sitting on the bar of heaven, struggling to get her rubbers over her shabby black shoes.

"I can't imagine where Mr. Gentry can be," she said plaintively. Then,

"Wait just a minute, poor boy. I'll get you a drink," she called.

And presently she leaned over to pour him a drink from a brown jug with a chipped spout. He held out his hands to catch the water but it was not water, it was sweet and sticky like molasses.

"Do have just one more waffle," Ma Gentry urged, or was it the angel?

And then the doctor arrived. He shook Dar-

row's shoulder to arouse him. Darrow, stupidly awake, saw the large professional assurance of the man bending over his bed, and felt that here was a person of importance who could do something about the situation.

"If it weren't such a damned pretty city," he complained to the doctor. "That's what helps to fool 'em. If we could scrape off some of the paint, now, or poke a hole through the canvas so they'd see it was not real. . . ."

The doctor popped a thermometer into his mouth.

Presently some one shook his shoulder again and the doctor removed the thermometer. If they would only let him alone!

He could see that the important person was still with him, frowning now over a thermometer. And Ma Gentry, anxious and fluttering, stood at the foot of his bed. He seized the arm of the competent looking man:

"Look! Look at her," he said excitedly, pointing to Ma Gentry. "She believes. Believes in principles and traditions and all sorts of things. She's the last believer left in Washington. Look

at her. See what belief does for you. Everybody laughs at her, poor old soul. Belief's a joke, I tell you . . . it's a joke."

Ma Gentry began to cry. The doctor moved over to her, tapping his forehead significantly.

"He's out of his head," the doctor said. "Fever of a hundred and three. Doesn't know what he's saying. Now I want to show you how to keep this chart until I can send a nurse."

The competent man was leaving, moving away with Ma Gentry who seemed distressed about something.

"Don't you see?" Darrow called after them, desperately. "Don't you see that it's just a painted city? The whole thing is a stage setting. Can't you see? Can't you see?"

VENEER

VENEER

Stephen Griswold had joined his wife in Washington for a winter of domesticity. Griswold had a passion for dissecting dead civilizations and an income sufficient to gratify his desires. He had been digging into Egypt for two years and had made a few discoveries of minor importance; now he was emerging from antiquity with the feeling of present obligations strong upon him. He was a just man and he realized that the fact that his wife made no demands upon him in itself created a demand.

Mrs. Griswold was big and handsome—of the somewhat overdeveloped type known to the Victorians as a “fine-looking woman.” Competent and unneurotic, she had decided preferences of her own but a broad tolerance for the preferences of others. She was enormously interested in the surface of life. She liked good-looking people, good-looking clothes, good food, pleasant houses, well-trained servants, well-managed golf clubs,

well-matched bridge games. So long as her friends kept the surface of their lives brightly polished, she was entirely uncritical of what might lie under the surface.

In several letters to her husband she had mentioned the charming Navy people whom she had met when she was visiting Ruth Eaton at Newport; and later she had written that some of them were to be stationed in Washington. She had been thinking for some time that it would be pleasant to spend a winter in the Capital and it would be especially pleasant now that she could attach herself to this delightful group of Navy people. So she had made arrangements to lease their Indianapolis house and she would move to Washington in October.

At once he had realized that, although she did not ask it of him, he could insure the success of her plans. In Indianapolis, where every one knew them and where every one made allowances for his wandering foot, her husbandless state was an accepted liability, to which their acquaintances made all the necessary adjustments. But in a city where her position was as yet unestablished, he

knew that a husband "somewhere in Egypt" would be like the ghost of a scandal. She would be left out of things and her social progress might be awkward. Without question or complaint she had given him two free winters in Egypt. He knew that he ought to give her a free winter in the land of her choice.

With her accustomed competence, Bertha promptly secured a furnished house in a satisfactory neighborhood, and by mid-October they were settled in their own establishment for a Washington season. The house they had taken was an old one on lower Eighteenth Street. It had an expressionless red brick exterior and a supremely comfortable interior; big, square, roomy rooms; thick walls built in the 'eighties when privacy and decorum still had value; deep, broad hearths on which bright fires already glowed, though Indian summer lingered in the valley of the Potomac and there was little autumn crispness in the air. It was distinctly Bertha's house. A house where one put aside adventure and doubt and remembered only the comfortable, sure things—success and prosperity and pleasure.

The season had opened early and Griswold found a number of engagements scheduled in Bertha's firm handwriting on his desk pad. Their first invitation was for a dinner party given by Captain and Mrs. Cameron, who lived in Chevy Chase.

Chevy Chase, it appeared, was a prosperous suburb—a succession of modern houses with generous lawns and clipped hedges. The Cameron house had an intricate arrangement of glassed-in porches. It reminded Griswold of an artichoke, one had to strip off so many outer layers before getting to the heart of the matter. The heart of the house, when one finally reached it, was a warm, rose-colored place filled now with high, gay chatter, with brittle laughter, with the glitter of jewels, and a confused mist of French perfumes.

The Griswolds were a little late; the other guests were already finishing their cocktails. Griswold was given a belated cocktail and a hasty introduction to the lady he was to take in to dinner. He had detected in his hostess's eye a flicker of anxiety which he attributed to the delay, so he emptied his glass without ceremony. His destined

dinner partner, a small, eager woman, reproached him archly for his lack of appreciation.

"The kind of gin the Camerons give you ought to be drunk reverently with silent prayer," she said.

He smiled down at her absently. It occurred to him that prohibition was the final invasion of privacy. Formerly one had found a certain spiritual sanctuary in the exaltation of a stimulant; even in its social uses wine had been essentially sacramental. Now, with the inevitable and facetious discussion which must encompass each drink, the temple of one's spirit was invaded by jazz.

This was the first formal dinner that Griswold had attended for nearly three years. Looking about the determinedly gay company which rimmed the beautifully appointed table, he was consciously detached. He could see this modern civilization, as he saw the ancient civilizations of the East, a thing apart from himself.

There were a dozen guests, most of them Navy people. A cousin of Mrs. Cameron who held one of the lesser Cabinet posts and a member of Congress who was, Griswold gathered, on the

committee concerned with Naval Affairs were the civilian exceptions. But all of the men, save Griswold himself, were officials. They were men concerned with the mechanics of the present civilization. And they were, he observed, all of a type. Unspeculative eyes, complacent mouths.

But he was more interested in the women. Women were always the precipitant of a civilization. Bertha had described these women as "particularly charming," and knowing Bertha's definitions he could quickly identify the elements of the "charm" she had found. They were well-groomed, handsome, socially assured women, who would touch life lightly, instinctively avoiding reality. Yet there was nothing mystic or ascetic in their withdrawals; their ritual of avoidance was physical.

They had standardized personal beauty. Their marcelled heads, massaged throats, creamed and tinted faces, powdered backs and arms, manicured hands and pink glittery nails presented a bodily repetition which had the authority of a dogma.

They had standardized and intensified activity.

Griswold knew from their quick gestures, their restless eyes, as well as from the allusions of their table talk, that they were busy about many things, and all of them busy about the same things. You could not expect any one of them to find time to sit at the feet of a prophet. He smiled at the madness of the image.

The small, eager one whom he had taken in to dinner asked him if he had heard the last story about a certain personage. He confessed that he had not. She raised her voice a little, so that others could hear it too. It was a new story and she did not wish to waste it on one person.

“ . . . His wife thought they had just come and she said to them, ‘Won’t you have a cup of tea now?’ but he promptly intervened and said, ‘Oh, no. They’ve had their tea!’ Imagine it!”

“That’s what you call household economy, I suppose,” said a man across the table.

“Well, I fancy you’ve all heard the one about his shopping expedition for gloves . . . ?” The soft, silky blonde on the right of the host looked hopefully down the table.

"No. Tell it," came a comforting chorus.

The blonde fumbled the story but came to a successful and exclamatory conclusion:

". . . And when he opened his pocket-book, two moths flew out!"

Somebody knew a funny one about the Secretary of the Navy and some one else capped it with a tale of the Secretary's wife. The member of Congress contributed a bit of cloakroom gossip which turned on the naval appropriations bill and which immediately interested the company. All of them listened to him with strained avidity and the women as well as the men asked shrewd, quick questions.

Griswold, alien, detached, felt curiously alive in the midst of death. Surely this was a dead civilization; the spirit of the thing was dead. And yet, by some alchemy of materialism, the body remained warm to the touch. Presently it would crumble into dust. But why was he alive? Why had he not died with his civilization? He could feel life strong within him, beating like a pulse.

Irrelevantly he remembered a statuette in the tomb of Mehenkwetre; remembered the puzzled

faith which an artist four thousand years ago had painted into the solemn eyes of the little wooden "Answerer."

A fragment of an old Egyptian poem lodged in his thought:

"It is the voice of the swallow that speaketh;
It saith: 'The earth is bright, whither goest thou?'"

Across buried centuries, the spirit of the world's youth came to him, silver-winged, alive. It was only the body of that entombed existence that was dry and fragile, ready to disintegrate at a careless touch. The spirit lived. Warm, strengthening contrast to this dead life about him, this automation existence on which no God had breathed!

But a sudden doubt plagued him. What if he romanticized the buried past? Perhaps if he could have been a banquet guest in the home of one of the captains in the army of the great Dhutmōse, he would have felt the same sense of frustration which he felt now, surrounded by Bertha's "perfectly charming Navy people." Perhaps civilization had always been a mechanical device, a shield which stupid people raised against life.

The flare of general conversation had again subsided a gossip *à deux*. Conscious of his shortcomings as a diner out, he turned to the lady for whose entertainment he was responsible. She had plainly abandoned him. Her thin, bepowdered shoulder-blade was frankly turned upon him; the rhinestone ornament on the strap of her low-cut gown mocked his social inadequacy. He could hear her eager voice saying to the man on her left:

"And naturally, with no re-entry in spades, I was utterly lost. If he had only taken me out on his diamonds. . . . But that's the stupid sort of thing he does. Did you hear what Captain Frazer said to him at the Trenholms' party? . . . You *didn't*! You'll simply *love* it! Captain Frazer had bid a heart and Mrs. Trenholm made an informative double. . . ."

"You seem utterly lost to the party, Mr. Griswold." A disapproving, staccato voice picked him up from the social oblivion into which he had fallen.

"Whatever are you thinking?"

He turned to the lady on his right. She was a little harder of surface, a little more brightly

polished than the others. She wore a great many jewels and played with them constantly; her hands were never quiet.

"I was thinking," Griswold answered her, "that probably all civilizations were fundamentally the same."

Her uninterested eyes emptied of the faint amusement they had held.

"Oh," she said.

Griswold felt guilty. Bertha would expect him to make a passable impression anyway. He struggled for greater adequacy.

"I was thinking," he continued, "that civilization is, after all, a veneer. To prove my point, let's take a personal example. Let's take you."

She gave him full and instant attention. Now the talk was on the plane she understood, the personal plane.

Griswold followed up his trump lead.

"Now you," he said, "are the final exclamation point after the last word in civilization."

She preened herself pleasurably under his lazy appraisal.

"But," he continued, "it is doubtless veneer."

If anything cut through the surface, probably you'd show the same old primitive passions that your savage ancestors had. Under this very delightful surface, you've still got it in you to love, and to hate, even to kill!"

He stopped, amazed. At the word "hate" an extraordinary thing happened. It was as though the pretty social mask which she wore had been slashed open; it was as though her face had been enameled and suddenly the enamel had cracked. So swift and so devastating was the passion that possessed her.

"Yes, I can hate," she said. Her quick, incisive voice had become slow and thick, as if she were drunk with passion. "And I could kill too. I would gladly kill them . . . the men who spoiled my husband's life. Gladly. With my own hands."

Her thin, be-ringed fingers twisted cruelly. They tightened about some unseen throat.

Afterwards, Griswold could not remember how he had floundered back onto safe conversational shores, dragging her with him.

Driving home that night, he asked his wife:

"What sort of misfortune did Mrs. Hammer-ton's husband suffer?"

Bertha turned to him in quick, interested surprise.

"Oh, did she speak of it to you?"

"She—er—alluded to it," he said.

"How queer! Of course she has taken it frightfully hard, every one says. Ruth Eaton told me that she broods over it even now, though it's years since it happened. But to speak of it to some one she's only just met—I shouldn't think she would do that."

Bertha's inflection held a measure of disapproval.

"But what was the thing that happened?" her husband persisted.

"Oh. It was just that her husband was 'plucked.'"

"'Plucked,' " he echoed vaguely. Navy slang was not yet a part of his vocabulary.

"Yes. They used to have plucking boards, I believe. When a certain rank got crowded—too many captains or too many commanders for instance—and promotions were all tied up, then the

plucking board would pick out a number of men who weren't conspicuously good officers and retire them. Of course, when the men were fairly young, they were retired at a low rank and lost their chance to rise in the Service. That was awfully hard on some of them, because you know lots of Navy people have very little money. You wouldn't think it, because they do manage to keep up appearances so wonderfully. That's what I like about them—they keep up so!"

"They seem to," he agreed. "And has it been a long time, then, since Mrs. Hammerton's husband was plucked?"

"Oh, years. He was only a commander."

"Well, I shouldn't think it would be so much of a financial disaster to them," Griswold said. "Those jewels that she wore to-night could hardly be a matter of 'keeping up appearances.' Emeralds like hers couldn't very well be bluff."

"Oh, no!" Bertha protested. "They have ever so much money. It's not the loss of pay that makes Jane Hammerton so bitter. It's the loss of rank. She's a frightfully ambitious woman, you see. She would love to be the wife of an

admiral and sit aloft in Washington snipping the threads of social destiny. It makes her perfectly raging that she can't. They say she's never forgiven the men who sat on the plucking board that retired Commander Hammerton."

"Probably she hasn't," Griswold agreed.

"Every one says the boards were unfair," Bertha added justly. Bertha was always just. "There was a lot of wire-pulling and favoritism and all that sort of thing. The Service is full of cliques; just a network of intrigue under the surface, you know."

"Ah, but such a nicely polished surface," he suggested.

"Yes, such a perfect surface. Such charming people!" his wife agreed enthusiastically.

Bertha was surprised when her husband accompanied her to the coming-out party for the Hammerton's oldest daughter, Janet.

"But, darling, you hate crowded parties and this will be a mob. Besides, I don't expect you to sacrifice yourself in the afternoon. You're a lamb to rush about with me in the evenings when

all the time you're bored to death. Why don't you go to the Cosmos Club this afternoon and find some nice old archeologist and talk about your precious mummies?"

"Well, I found Mrs. Hammerton a very interesting woman. I'd rather like to see what her daughter is like," Griswold said.

Janet Hammerton, standing next to her mother in the receiving line, was in many ways a replica of the elder woman. She was tall and slender and fashionable, with a little too much manner. There seemed to Stephen Griswold something incongruous about the round, innocent bouquet which she held in her arms, something incongruous about the pink buds which had been massed in vases and bowls and set about the spacious rooms. The element of incongruity, he decided, lay in the girl's expression—in the sulkiness of her eyes, the hardness of her young mouth. There was no youth upon her except the absence of years.

In the crush he was separated from Bertha and he pushed vaguely through the eddying crowds, looking for her. Back in the library, he found a dim corner, where he could stand quietly

and wait; Bertha was so clever about crowds that eventually she would find him. He wondered irritably why he had come to this senseless affair; he wished he had gone to the club, as Bertha had advised.

Idly he picked up a silver-framed photograph from the table at his side. A child looked at him, from the misty gray print. He smiled into her eyes, as one must needs smile into the eyes of faith. He thought he had never seen a lovelier face. Certainly, he had never seen such believing eyes. Nor such a tender, young mouth with one corner quirked in a funny little smile. He had a book of poems at home that he would like to read to this child. Rhythmic fragments left from the days when the earth had been young and there had been wonder in the world. This child would understand them. And there was a queer old tale of a Prince who ventured into the land of Mitanni, an unfinished tale. The end of the story was buried under the dust of centuries but he knew that together this child and he could make an ending. He knew it by the quirk of her smile.

"Oh, here you are. I couldn't imagine . . ."

Bertha had rescued him, as he had expected she would. He held out the photograph for her to see.

"Who is this little girl?" he asked. "Do you know?"

Bertha looked at it and laughed.

"Why, that's Janet Hammerton," she said. "Or at least it was Janet some years ago, when she was about ten years old. Her mother was showing it to me only last week. Charming picture, isn't it? She must have been a cunning youngster. Well, shall we go? You don't want tea or an ice?"

Griswold put the photograph back on the table, carefully. He handled it with a sort of reverent gentleness, as though it were the picture of a child who had died. As of course it was. There was nothing of this child in the sleek, assured young woman he had greeted in the adjoining room.

During the winter, he saw Mrs. Hammerton rather frequently. Washington, he discovered, was socially a three-ringed circus. There were the residential set, the political set and the Army and Navy sets. Occasionally their orbits intersected;

but for the most part one stayed in one's own set and met the same people day after day. Though they had no official status in military circles, yet Bertha had efficiently achieved identification with the Navy set and Mrs. Hammerton was one of her intimates.

As the winter progressed, they saw Janet Hammerton, too, with increasing frequency. At first she stayed with her own crowd, the younger crowd, and was naturally not included in such parties as the Griswolds attended. But after Senator Casson began paying her such serious and conspicuous attention, hostesses who desired to please him asked Janet Hammerton to any dinner where he was expected. There were many hostesses in the Navy who wished to please him, because he was chairman of the powerful Senate Committee on Naval Affairs, and the appropriation bill that season held some explosive possibilities.

Senator Casson was much older than Janet, and was a widower of some years standing. He had never bothered to keep himself physically fit and he had the heavy, senatorial figure. His eyes

were small, red-brown, shrewd and restless, but the lids were puffy and heavy and gave a deceptive effect of sleepiness. With Janet his manner was a little too possessive to suit a critical taste, but she seemed not to resent it. She was always particularly daring and modern when she was with him; it seemed to amuse him to be shocked.

Late in April they were married. It was one of the big weddings of the season. The President and his wife came, all the members of the cabinet, most of the diplomats, the Senator's colleagues of course, and practically all the Navy people. The society editors of the local newspapers filled columns and columns with descriptions of costumes and wedding gifts.

The Griswolds were a little late and had to sit far back in the church but they were at the end of the pew and could see everything. The bride's mother looked tired, but shinningly triumphant, as she passed slowly up the aisle.

Ruth Eaton from the pew ahead leaned back and whispered to Bertha:

"This is a great day for Jane Hammerton.

They say she made the match. Now, she will have her innings with the men who plucked Ned Hammerton. Sue Cameron told me that Jane has it all arranged where she is going to have each one of them ordered. To the ends of the earth, my dear—the ends of the earth! It will be years before any of them see a decent post of duty again. You know, Senator Casson can get anything done at the Department; the Secretary is so anxious about this year's appropriations that he eats out of Casson's hand."

Bertha made a little clicking sound with her tongue. She liked being "in" on official gossip.

"Well, you really can't blame Jane for taking her revenge," she said justly.

Ruth Eaton's whispered answer was lost in the triumphant burst of music as the organist swerved from a soft meditation into the Lohengrin wedding march.

The bride passed very close to Griswold and he looked in vain for a trace of the lovely child that once had been Janet Hammerton. Assured, complacent, incongruously veiled, she walked with

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a rhythmic grace to the altar where her elderly bridegroom waited, the bridegroom who would presently scatter the enemies of her family to desolate places at the uttermost parts of the earth. And Griswold knew that the child with the believing eyes and the tender mouth was dead.

"Into this holy estate these two persons present come now to be joined."

The officiating clergyman had a rich, beautifully Anglicized voice which filled the nave of the church.

But Stephen Griswold was listening to the echo of a woman's voice, thick with hatred:

". . . I would kill them gladly. Gladly. With my own hands. . . ."

"But she killed the wrong one," he thought querulously. "That lovely child. . . ."

Again the music triumphed and the wedding party came down the aisle to rapid, Mendelssohnian strains. The church emptied quickly. Wedding guests formed eager, exclamatory groups on the pavement or rushed about searching for parked cars.

Bertha was going on to the reception. But she

took Stephen to his club first. It was oppressively warm; Bertha lowered the glass in the window of the car and loosened the furs about her throat.

"We really should be making plans for the summer," she said. "The heat comes very early in Washington. Have you any preference about a place to go?"

"None. Any place you select," Griswold answered. "But I've about decided to go with Graham to Syria next winter. I expect to talk it over with him this afternoon."

Bertha shrugged a tolerant shoulder.

"He's the worst frump you've ever attached yourself to," she said.

She considered her husband with a faint, transient wonder in her eyes.

"Steve, don't you ever get tired of blowing the dust off the past?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"No. I'm a confirmed romanticist. I think I can never learn to bear the realism of the present."

Their car was edging to the curb before his club.

"Will you try Washington again next year?" he asked.

"Oh, yes indeed," she said. "I rather think now I'll buy a house so that we can have a permanent home here. You see, I've made so many friends. And they *are* such charming people."

THE BETTER PART

THE BETTER PART

Miss Lillian King was the sort of woman who wears a single flower and who knows the birds by their songs. She taught school in a little mid-western town until she was thirty years old; then she took a Civil Service examination and got a clerkship in one of the Government departments in Washington. She was thrilled by the opportunities for culture which the Capital city offered.

For eight years she worked in the same office, a small room which looked out on a court. She always had some kind of potted plant on the corner of her desk and as the desk was next to a southern window she was very successful with her plants. Every morning, as soon as she had removed her wraps, she watered her flower and trimmed the dead leaves.

She worked on an elaborate index. Her cards were accurate and neat and were separated by symbolic markers, red and blue and green, about

which she was very particular. But she did not get a great deal done in a day because she was afraid of disorder. Her blotter had to be preserved from ink spots, her desk from dust and her clothes from wrinkles. Her office clothes were planned carefully; they were always simple and conservative. In the winter she wore dark blue and in the summer immaculate white. Her sleeves were invariably long and she never wore to the office a dress which exposed her throat below the collar bone.

When her day's work was over she hurried eagerly to her class. Each year she registered at George Washington University for one of the evening classes. By this means she had freshened her French and Spanish; had dipped into psychology; had blown some of the dust from her knowledge of history; and she was now indulging herself with a course in English poetry. As she walked briskly to the University each afternoon, her face to the glowing western sky, she liked to repeat bits of poetry to herself—Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," one of Tennyson's Idyls, Wordsworth's sonnets and his "Intimations on

Immortality." She was especially partial to Wordsworth.

But the routine of her life was suddenly shattered. Congress passed a law which broadened the activities of her Department. The section in which she worked grew overnight into a division, and she was moved from her bright little corner with its southern exposure into a dark, musty corner of a big room on the eastern side of the building. For a day laborers noisily dragged desks and file cases and typewriters into the room. At one end were the typists, and at Miss King's end, the clerks. Although the room was big, it was very crowded; one had to edge carefully about the corners of desks and draw in one's breath to slip between the rows of file cases. The second day after her move, Miss King arrived in the morning to find her potted plant on the floor. The pot was shattered into bits and the head of the geranium had snapped off in the fall. As she was awkwardly sweeping up the fragments with a small dust brush, Mrs. Horton came in. Mrs. Horton was a heavy, emphatic woman who breathed asthmatically.

"You'll have to give up your plants, Miss King," she commented promptly. "There's no room for truck of that kind in this crowded office."

Miss King smiled. She had thin lips and her smiles, like her philosophy, were deliberately sweet.

"No, I suppose I shan't be able to have them now," she assented. "And 'Oh, the difference to me,' " she quoted with mild literary facetiousness.

Mrs. Horton wheezed and opened her morning paper at the department store advertisements.

The chief of Miss King's division had a plan for scattering the new clerks who had been taken on to handle the increase of work, and letting the old clerks initiate them into Governmental methods. A Miss Andrews was assigned to Miss King. Gloria Andrews was her name and she sat at a shinningly new oak desk on Miss King's right. She wore a purple dress of some shoddy material, rather daringly cut, and around her cheap felt hat she had draped a purple veil. On the blank which she filled in for the personnel office, she put down her age as twenty-five years. Miss King accepted this; she always accepted

statements. But the other women shrugged their shoulders.

"Twenty-five! She will never see twenty-nine again," Miss Fairchild commented. Miss Fairchild was a little, gray-haired file clerk who had a long sharp nose and protruding teeth and who snapped up bits of information which she stored away like a squirrel. She produced one of these bits now.

"The other day," she said, "I happened to look at Miss Andrews in the rest room when she was brushing her hair. And by the way, that's something that ought to be put a stop to, women primping in Government time!—Well, her ears were uncovered and she's got those fine lines in front of each ear. Not wrinkles exactly but lines. That's a sure sign of being thirty years old."

"Yes, I've noticed that too," Miss Jones corroborated. Miss Jones was thin and eager and held her head turned a little to one side as though she were always listening.

"And besides," she added, "the other afternoon when Miss Andrews was humming to herself, I recognized the tune. It was from one of Julia

Sanderson's old hits, 'The Sunshine Girl.' My dear, you can date a woman by the tunes she hums."

"Well, maybe so," Miss King agreed. She felt confused, as she always did when people pelted her with facts.

"But she's young *looking*, and I think she's going to make a good clerk. She tries so hard to do just as I tell her."

"Um . . . perhaps. A new broom . . ."

Miss Fairchild suggested ominously.

But Miss King continued to take a kindly interest in the novitiate of Gloria Andrews. She learned that Miss Andrews lived in one of the small towns over on the Virginia side of the Potomac and commuted every day. Gloria confided to Miss King that until she got this Civil Service appointment, she had taught in a small county school. Immediately Miss King grew sentimental and wistful.

"Oh, my dear," she said, "I don't know that you have done a wise thing in giving up your profession. I used to teach and I often feel that my teaching days were my happiest. Leading young

minds along paths of beauty—what could be more satisfying!”

Gloria Andrews had oddly flecked amber eyes which seldom committed themselves to any emotion. But now they quite definitely filled with contempt.

“For myself,” she said coldly, “I’m fed up with the dirty little brats. I loathe children.”

“Dear child!” Miss King’s thin, shocked voice erected a flimsy barrier against Gloria’s full-toned hate. “Dear child, you are tired . . . weary. That’s why you feel as you do. Of course in your heart you really love children. Precious little souls ‘trailing clouds of glory.’”

She smiled upon the younger woman, filling her pale blue eyes and her thin lips with sweetness, as one would pour syrup into a shallow dish. For she believed it every one’s duty to radiate “sweetness and light,” as dear Arnold would put it.

Gloria Andrews picked up the work very quickly. When she had been in the office two weeks she could do as much as Miss King in half the time consumed by that careful lady, and she was reasonably accurate. Miss King praised her

work to the other clerks and one day when Mr. Weller sauntered past her desk, Miss King detained him to show him what good progress her pupil was making. Mr. Weller was a tall, blond man in his middle thirties who was already getting bald. He had a permanent pucker between his brows so that he always looked puzzled, and his shoulders drooped. On pay-days his wife usually came to the office to take his check for deposit in the bank. She was a dark, plain woman, brisk and competent. They had four children and people wondered how they got along on his salary. But now that the office was enlarged, he had been put in charge of a section—the section in which Miss King worked—and it was understood that he would get a promotion next July.

“See, Mr. Weller,” Miss King said to him, “what good work this little lady is doing.”

Gloria Andrews was quite as tall as Miss King and weighed a good bit more, but Miss King used “little” as an adjective of affection.

Mr. Weller smiled in his vague way and Gloria smiled back at him, an arch, glittering sort of

smile. He settled his cravat and cleared his throat.

"I'm sure Miss Andrews is going to prove a real acquisition to the office," he said heavily.

Gloria dropped her eyes. She had long, thick lashes which curved prettily against her cheeks.

"Miss King will spoil me, I'm afraid," she said. Then she opened her eyes suddenly, full upon Mr. Weller. "And you too," she added.

Mr. Weller looked more than usually confused and self-conscious. But he was pleased. It had been many years since any woman had flattered his masculinity with coquetry.

Half an hour later, Gloria casually asked Miss King,

"Is it Mr. Weller who recommends us for promotions, when the time comes?"

"Er . . . I beg your pardon?" Miss King looked up vaguely from her card work.

Gloria repeated the question.

"Yes," Miss King told her.

After that Gloria found a number of reasons for consulting Mr. Weller about her work. With

a paper or a couple of index cards in her hand, she would make her way through the crowded aisles to his desk in the center of the long room. Mr. Weller always rose courteously from his seat and Gloria would stand very close to him for purposes of consultation. She wore her dresses cut quite low and she used some sort of insistent perfume. Her figure was a little full and soft for the prevailing uncorseted style but she followed the style.

Miss King was hurt when she found that her protégé was going over her head for assistance.

"Why, I could have told you that, my dear," she said once or twice when Gloria returned from her consultations with the section head. Gloria smiled non-committally but continued to consult him.

Very often now Miss King would look over at the desk on her right and find Gloria missing, but she could not complain because the work was always up to date. Other clerks told her that if she wanted Gloria the place to look for her was in the corridors. She and Mr. Weller were constantly to be seen walking together down the long western corridor, or standing very close together

in the embrasure of one of the deep windows. It became the subject of office gossip and back-of-the-hand whispers. These whispers grew more sibilant when Mr. Weller took Gloria off Miss King's work and moved her desk up close to his own, where she could assist him with some "special" records.

Miss Fairchild, whose desk was also near the center of the room, watched them hungrily, wobbling her nose like a rabbit, and worrying her underlip with her teeth.

Some of the more determined spirits among the women decided that something would have to be done. So they went to the Division Chief and formally complained. They told him that such "goings-on" were intolerable and that they would not stand for any little chit like that being promoted over the heads of decent women.

The Division Chief, florid and important, merely said "Um" and "Ah" and fingered his pencil. But the pencil was a blue one and after the women had gone, he ran it sharply through two names on a list he had on his desk. He had been sitting up nights over this list. Two Senators

were prodding him pretty sharply for promotions for clerks in whom they were interested, and he had been at a loss to see how he could manipulate the amount he had at his disposal. Now he saw. He ran his pencil through two names—George Weller and Gloria Andrews. Of course he had promised Weller, poor chap, and he had promised him the promotion for Miss Andrews too. But then he couldn't stand for this kind of thing in the office . . . letting down the moral tone. . . . Certainly not! He cleared his throat and reached for the desk telephone. He had better let those Senators know right away that he had managed . . . with great difficulty, of course . . . to put through the promotions they wanted.

On July first, when promotions were announced, Gloria's desk was moved back to its old position, next to Miss King, and it became known through the office that neither she nor Mr. Weller had received any advance in salary. Mr. Weller looked white and sick and when his wife came to get his check he went out into the corridor with her and was absent for a long while. When he came back into the room he made his way to his desk by a

circuitous route, so as to avoid Gloria Andrews. He need not have bothered. Gloria never sought opportunities to consult him or to come near him after that day.

About a week later she secured a leave pass and was away from the office for several hours in the forenoon. She did not tell any one where she was going, but she was dressed for the occasion. She had long since discarded the cheap purple frock which she had worn when she first came into the office and her new things were patently expensive in cut and material. She told Miss King that she had opened a charge account at the best women's outfitters in the city. So to-day she wore a very clever costume of some transparent summer stuff, in a pleasant shade of tan; and to match her eyes she had a chain of amber about her white throat.

When she returned from her short "leave of absence," there was a sort of hard triumph about her. She promptly told Miss King that she had been over to the Main Building to see the head of the Appointment Office of the Department.

"A friend of mine who knows him went with

me," she said complacently, "And I've got a transfer to another Bureau. There's no sense in staying in this dump. Nothing but a lot of cats and no future."

She glanced over the crowded room contemptuously.

Miss King's mild blue eyes filled with tears.

"I'm sorry you haven't been happy with us," she said. "But I think you are mistaken about the office. There isn't any nicer office, I'm sure," she finished with a prideful straightening of her thin shoulders.

"And I shall miss you, my dear," she smiled at Gloria. She still felt it her duty to draw the girl into her circle of sweetness and light. But Gloria did not bother to smile back. She knew definitely now that friendship with Miss King was just so much excess baggage.

So Gloria was gone from the office but not from the office gossip. Her departmental career unfurled a streamer of colorful talk which rippled behind her, like the purple veil she had worn when she first came. Through various underground railroads, Miss Fairchild and Miss Jones got all

the facts and all the surmises about her official life. And it was easy to tell when they had news of her, because they would quickly collect about them an excited, whispering group and from this group a quiver of excitement would run through the office. There would be a whole day of emotional disturbance and bad temper. Though she had passed forever from their stagnant lives, these women were still strangely hostile to her, avidly interested in her.

Miss King was usually the last to hear the gossip but eventually some one would bring the latest items and lay them before her like lurid bits of stained glass through which they expected her to look at life. It disturbed her. She wanted to look at life through her nice, clean spectacles of self-improvement or through the lovely mauve veil of nineteenth century poetry.

The Bureau to which Gloria had gotten a transfer was only a temporary resting place. Inside of two months she got another transfer. This time she was made confidential secretary to the head of the Appointment Office, the man who had given her the first transfer. Miss Jones knew all

about it from one of the girls who worked in the Appointment Office.

"It seems," said Miss Jones, "that she was always coming over to thank him for that first change, and to tell him how much she owed to him. And the girls say she would stay an hour at a time, sitting awfully close to him the way she did with poor Mr. Weller, and talking. She told him that she was the mainstay of her family and that her father's health was very uncertain. She didn't know, she said, when she would have the whole responsibility."

"Huh!" Miss Jones' youngest listener made a scoffing sound, and the rest of the circle laughed.

Miss Jones thrust out her thin neck, like a hungry bird.

"So now what do you think?" she played with her listeners' avidity.

"What?" some one asked impatiently.

Miss Jones ran the tip of her tongue over her pale, cracked underlip.

"My dears!" she said, "he has *created* a place for her. He never had a confidential secretary before. And the girls in his office say he's got no

more use for one than a fish has for an umbrella. Practically all his correspondence is inter-office. He hardly ever writes an outside letter and when he does, all he's got to do is to call for one of the regular stenographers."

"Well, anyway, Miss Andrews isn't a stenographer. How can she be a secretary?" some one asked.

"Exactly," Miss Jones adopted the thought as her own. "Exactly. But he's made her his confidential secretary and what do you think she's getting? You remember her salary here was twelve hundred.

"She's getting sixteen hundred dollars to start on, to *start* on. And girls who've been in that office for years only getting twelve and fourteen hundred!"

Miss Jones sighed with the satisfaction of a good raconteur who has made the grade of her climax.

Reports trickled in of Gloria's high-handed methods in her new position. All persons having business with the chief of the Appointment Office had to see her first, it appeared. She separated

sheep from goats. She sorted all the mail, too, and read anything that looked important.

"And when she condescends to walk through the outer office on some errand, she treats those girls like they were dirt beneath her feet," Miss Fairchild reported. "Think of it—respectable girls having to stand for her airs!"

In six months she got another promotion. Eighteen hundred this time.

"And she says she has the promise of two thousand next July," Miss Jones told a shocked circle. "That's a rise of eight hundred in a single year and the rest of us, who merely *work*, we are lucky if we get two hundred in ten years!"

"Um. . . . Have you seen that fur coat she wore this winter?" contributed Miss Fairchild. "Even on sixteen hundred, how does she do it?"

There was hard, furtive laughter from the small group which had gathered, as it happened, about Miss King's desk.

Miss King remembered that she had seen the fur coat they spoke of. It had been very soft and luxurious. She had met Gloria Andrews coming unhurriedly away from the Departmental build-

ings, as she herself had been running to get back to her office before the lunch half-hour closed. Gloria, as confidential secretary, did not have to observe the regulation hours. She could come and go as she chose. Wrapped in her beautiful, warm cloak, she did not have to hurry even from the cold.

The next bulletin was brought in by some one who saw Gloria driving a new car.

"And I'll tell you it was no Ford," this courier reported.

Mrs. Horton choked and had to be beat on the back. When her "spell" was over, she said,

"I thought Miss Andrews was the sole support of an aged father and an invalid mother! Well, men'll believe anything . . . from certain women."

Everybody in the department must eventually have business with the Appointment Office. Even the higher chiefs found their way sooner or later to Gloria's anteroom. It was said that she was adept at sorting sheep from goats, and that she never wasted time on the wrong persons. In the following July, when she got the two thousand

dollars she had predicted for herself, she also got another transfer. This time she was made confidential secretary to an Assistant Secretary of the Department, a member of what Washington knows as the Baby Cabinet. He was a very dapper under-secretary, to whom the salary was mere pin money, but he had pulled wires to get the position in order to further his wife's social ambitions. His was little more than a rubber stamp job, but he came to the office every morning, looking a bit fagged from last night's party, and signed his name to the papers which were put in front of him.

Miss Fairchild knew one of the typists in his suite of offices and this typist told her all about Gloria.

"It seems," said Miss Fairchild, "that she goes into his private office and stays for hours. She always takes a notebook and a pencil with her and she swishes by the other clerks with that important air she has. But the other day, Jane—that's my friend who was telling me this, you know—Jane got hold of the notebook and looked through it and, my dear, there wasn't a scratch of a note in the whole thing!"

In the October following her appointment to this new position, Gloria was reported as having taken an apartment—one room and bath—at a very gay and very expensive apartment hotel. She told some one, who repeated it, that she couldn't stand the strain of commuting any longer. It unfitted her for responsibilities of her work, she said.

"Her work!" shrilled Miss Jones hysterically.

The apartment hotel which she had chosen was a good place to meet people with money. It took money to live there, and with the exception of a few clever hangers-on, all the guests had it. Moreover they were *newly* rich and sporty; they were still testing the reality of their wealth by lavish spending and they were far too naïve to be exclusive. There were nightly jazz parties and a rowdy friendliness pervaded the place. Most of the people were from out of town but at the dances there was always a big contingent of Washingtonians from the young and youngish sets. It was one of these Washingtonians, Frederick Pellet, who married Gloria Andrews. He was the son of the city's biggest real estate dealer. He had

flunked out of his junior year in college and had spent the ten subsequent years in his father's real estate office where his sales records had never equaled his salary check. But on three separate occasions he had made a killing at the Laurel races and he had invented a cocktail which had given him fame of a sort. He had a wide, good-natured grin and round, wondering blue eyes.

When Gloria's engagement was announced, the Washington papers all carried pictures of her, and she was described in the society columns as a charming young woman of an old Virginia family. Nothing was said of her employment in the Government.

" 'Old Virginia family!' " scoffed Miss Jones. "There's a Mrs. Nelson down in the Auditor's office who lives in the same town across the river where the Andrews family lives, and she knows all about them. She says Mr. Andrews came from Illinois and his wife came from Oklahoma. He was an undertaker out in Illinois but his business failed and he came here to Washington where he got a job clerking in his cousin's grocery store.

'Old Virginia family'—the dog's hind foot!" Miss Jones' voice had grown shriller and shriller and finally cracked on the exclamation point.

Gloria's wedding took place shortly after the announcement of her engagement, and Miss Fairchild showed Miss King the picture of the bride which she had cut from a Sunday newspaper. Miss King never read the Sunday papers and would have missed the picture but for Miss Fairchild's thoughtfulness. She spread the paper out on her desk and regarded it with a little hurt wonder in her eyes. She loved weddings—misty veils, orange blossoms, great drooping bouquets, all the romantic symbolism of marriage. During her girlhood she had dreamed of herself in just such a picture as this. Her dreams had been discreetly circumscribed; her timid imagination had never probed beyond the symbolism, and the triumphant notes of the Mendelssohn march had been for her the finality. Years had eaten away her youth and romance had retreated before her like a continuing mirage. It seemed a little hard, when she had kept herself so receptive. . . . She sighed as she

put down the picture of Gloria in bridal dress. Then she made herself smile brightly at Miss Fairchild.

"The child makes a lovely bride. Such a sweet, trusting look," she said.

Miss Fairchild stared at her, grunted, and walked away taking the newspaper clipping with her.

"That King woman is one of the biggest fools I ever knew," she confided to Miss Jones.

News of Gloria was scarce now. Miss Fairchild and Miss Jones had no way of tapping the sources of information since Gloria had become what the local papers called "a charming member of the young married set." But a year later there was another picture in the rotogravure section of the Sunday papers, a Madonna pose of Gloria bending over her baby.

"Sweet. Sweet," murmured Miss King.

"You sound like a canary," Mrs. Horton said angrily, and choked. Irritation always brought on her asthma.

A few months after this, Miss King saw Gloria, the only time she was ever to see her again.

It was late afternoon of a dark February day, with a fine sleety mist in the air and the streets filled with dirty slush. Miss King was hastening toward the University, her umbrella thrust out before her and two heavy books clasped close to her thin body, so that the umbrella could protect them from the sleet. As she stopped at a corner, waiting for a stream of cross-town traffic to pass, an automobile drew up at the curb close beside her. It was a charmingly appointed town car and Gloria herself was driving. On a rear seat was a nurse, wearing a dark blue cape and immaculate white linen, and holding a woolly pink bundle. Miss King peered into the car, trying to see the baby's face but she could only see the warm pink wrappings.

A sentence flickered across her memory—

"I loathe children."

She could hear Gloria's hate-filled voice saying it. She wondered if Gloria still felt that way. Then a strange, worldly thought came to Miss King. It occurred to her that even though Gloria

might not love the baby, she would value it. Dimly she perceived that babies guaranteed permanence. They stabilized a marriage . . . tightened a mother's clutch on life.

Gloria did not look to the side and so she did not see Miss King. She kept her eyes straight to the front, watching for the first break in traffic, biting her lips irritably at the delay. Miss King wondered mildly at such impatience. The closed car looked so warm and comfortable. Gloria really should be contented and patient, she thought.

A dull depression settled upon Miss King. It misted under her durable optimism, as the sleet was misting under her cotton umbrella. She felt suddenly very tired. Tired of sameness, tired of struggle. With a flash of imagery, she saw life as a bright red bird which had to be trapped. You could not catch it by putting salt on its tail. If you were credulous and believed such fairy tales, then the bright bird would flash past you and taunt you from a high tree top. Gloria now. . . . Gloria had trapped life and carried it about with her in a golden cage.

Of course she did not believe all those dreadful things Miss Fairchild and Miss Jones and the other women intimated . . . but still it was irrefutable that Gloria had been hard and cold; she had used people and she had lied. Yet she had everything.

The traffic cleared. Gloria sped away and Miss King, settling her umbrella at a more protective angle, walked doggedly on. She straightened her thin shoulders and drew her familiar philosophy about her chilled spirit. How wrong it was of her to think such unbeautiful thoughts! How wrong and how untrue. What was that wonderful thing she had read in Browning class only yesterday? (Miss King was "taking" Browning at the University this session.)

"I will pass each, and see their happiness,
And envy none—being just as great, no doubt,
Useful to men, and dear to God, as they!"

She repeated the lines to herself, like a marching song, and quickened her step. There was a sud-

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den crunching sound beneath her feet, as a deceptive crust of ice broke and the dirty water oozed over her rubber shoes. As she dragged out of the chill puddle, her left ankle twisted and some of the water trickled coldly into her shoe. It made a slushing noise as she walked on.

PENSIONED

PENSIONED

She had been a Government clerk for half a century and she had reached the retirement age. She was seventy years old. Her birthday came in April, month of beginnings.

As she rode down town to work for the last time, the dazzling April sunlight, reflected from broad, asphalted avenues, hurt her eyes so that she could not look out of the car window. Spring in Washington is unvirginal; save for an occasional day of chill denial, it offers its beauty with a hot, passionate urgency. There was a languorous heat in the air that morning, and in the crowded car she found it a little difficult to breathe. She tugged at the window by her side, thinking to raise it an inch or two. As usual, the strap was broken and the patent catch would not work. After a minute she gave up the attempt. She rubbed the tips of her fingers against one another, flicking any possible dust from her smooth black gloves. She glanced sideways at the man

next to her. He was absorbed in his morning paper and had paid no attention to her futile efforts to raise the window. Her side glance was discreet, genteel, but contemptuous. How men were losing all chivalry, she reflected.

The car had a flattened wheel and her seat seemed to be directly over the wheel. The grinding noise and the unpleasant vibrations made her nervous. Her quick, dark eyes looked about at her fellow passengers. That woman across the aisle two seats ahead was familiar; they rode down town in the same car nearly every day. She was sure the woman would get out at 17th and H Streets, the Navy Department stop. If she could be quick, now, she could slip into the seat as the woman vacated it. She tightened her hold on her shiny black bag, which held her money and her lunch, and grasped the handle of her neat black umbrella. (In spite of the brilliant sunshine, the "weather man" predicted showers, and one could never be sure of April.) She rose and edged past the man who shared her seat. She said, "Pardon me," but she said it coldly, remembering that he had not helped with the window. She stood for a

minute in the aisle, taking her chance. Ah, just as she had thought. The woman did get out at H Street. She slipped into the more comfortable seat. A pale glow of satisfaction enveloped the remaining ten minutes of her ride to work. It had been an adventure, creditably concluded.

Promptly at eight forty-five she passed through the gapping black doors of the great white stone Government building where she worked.

"Good morning," she said to the watchman who guarded the entrance. She did not smile as she said it; it was merely the perfunctory courtesy that one grants an inferior. A great gulf yawned between a clerk and a watchman.

"Good morning, Miss Graham," he replied with a large affability. He was always affable until nine o'clock in the morning. After that he could be pompous and stern enough to the breathless unfortunates who tried to get past him without signing a tardy slip. But Miss Graham was never one of those. She had been a clerk in the Department when he first came on duty and hers was one of the few names he knew.

As always, she was the first to arrive in the

room where she had a desk. She hung her neat black coat, her neat black hat and her neat black umbrella on her own special rack. Then she took a piece of black cheese cloth from the upper left drawer of her desk and briskly dusted off the top of the desk. She shook the cloth carefully out the window, folded it into a small square and replaced it in its proper corner of the drawer. From a lower drawer she drew out two sheets of white paper and deftly pinned them into fresh paper cuffs to protect the sleeves of her neat white waist.

Young Mrs. Krause came bursting through the door, flinging some flippancy back over her shoulder, at an unseen acquaintance in the corridor. Mrs. Krause was the typist for the room. She widened her eyes and laughed when she saw the paper cuffs Miss Graham was making.

"Surely you aren't going to work, *to-day*, your very last day!" she exclaimed.

Miss Graham lifted cool, disapproving eyes. She disapproved of everything about Mrs. Krause. She thought typists unnecessary and rather cheap. There had been a dignity about the old days when every Government clerk was required to write a

"copper plate hand." The old record books, on which the workers had taken such meticulous pains, had a real beauty, she thought. Now everything was jammed into a machine and came out with no character, no individuality. And the young women who wrote on the machines seemed to her, as a class, careless and unrefined. She had two special objections to Mrs. Krause; one was the flagrant openness with which that young person "made up" her face, the second was the fact that she had a husband. Miss Graham did not believe that married women should work in offices.

She looked coolly at Mrs. Krause and a sharp retort was on the tip of her tongue. Then she remembered that this *was* the last day; it was best to have everything pleasant. So she only said, a little stiffly,

"I should like to feel that my last day's work was my best."

Mrs. Krause laughed.

"Gosh!" she said. "You don't catch me handing Uncle Sam anything extra."

She yawned. She was always sleepy in the mornings, for she went out a great deal at night.

Miss Graham was constantly warning her against a breakdown, if she did not stop burning the candle at both ends. As she removed the cover from her typewriter, she began to sing a careless phrase from a dance song popular at the moment.

"I always thought
The nights were much too short,"

she sang. Miss Graham frowned, but of course until nine o'clock she could not insist on quiet in the room.

Mr. Tupper was the next to arrive. He grunted a morning greeting; Mr. Tupper always grunted his civilities. He was a small, nervous man who wore purple neckties and was marvelously accurate. Miss Graham's work was a sort of check on his, but she could never catch him in a mistake. She approved of him. He spread out his morning paper now, reading the editorial page very carefully. He always read the editorials and Miss Graham approved of that. She knew that promptly at nine o'clock he would put his paper away; he never stole "Government time."

With only two minutes grace left her, Miss

Satterwaite entered. Miss Satterwaite was a heavy, blond woman, whose corsets creaked. They had heard her voice in the corridor, just outside the door, for some minutes, talking very fast. Miss Satterwaite knew all the office gossip. She knew about the promotion lists weeks before they were announced, and she knew about demotions too. Sometimes she brought terror and uncertainty into the room, with some vague rumor of reorganization and pay-roll cutting. Although these rumors usually turned out to be unfounded, they never failed to terrorize. She knew a great deal of personal gossip too, which she imparted discreetly at such times as Mr. Tupper was out of the room. Some of the stories made Miss Graham blush; a faint pink color would steal up under her high cheek bones. But although the stories were such as she herself would have hesitated to tell, she approved of Miss Satterwaite because that much-informed lady always took the side of virtue. Mrs. Krause, now, used to make hot excuses for the sinners. Sometimes for days Mrs. Krause and Miss Satterwaite would not speak to each other.

A loud gong rang somewhere out in the corridor, a prolonged ugliness of sound. The laggard footsteps going past the door, quickened and then ceased. Every one in the room settled to work in a burst of nine o'clock energy. Miss Graham's pen began to scratch; Mr. Tupper shuffled his papers; Mrs. Krause started her rapid typing—there was a rhythm to her touch on the machine; Miss Satterwaite pulled open a file drawer and entered on her daily battle to keep the "Mc"s out of the "M"s.

The day progressed a little differently from other days. Many persons from distant rooms came in for just a word of farewell to Miss Graham; there was almost a holiday air about it. At noon, just as she was opening her bottle of milk and spreading her sandwiches on a clean paper napkin, one of the negro messengers brought her a note. It was from the chief of her division, and requested that she close her desk at four o'clock and report to his office. Of course, she knew what this meant. When clerks had served for many years, as she had, there was always some little ceremony attached to their going into retirement.

She had expected it, but still a pleased pinkness crept into her dry, wrinkled cheeks.

Promptly at four, she placed her last paper in the wire basket marked "outgoing," put down her pen and unpinned her paper cuffs. There was something almost soldierly about her thin, erect figure as she stepped into the spacious office of the division chief and walked up to his shining mahogany desk. Many people had gathered there. All the clerks of the division were crowded against the walls and a buzz of talk quieted at her entrance. She was confused, excited, but she kept her eyes on the chief's face as she marched up to his desk, and held her head up, chin in, shoulders back, just as she had been taught to hold them in the dead century which had prized dignity of carriage.

There was a great bouquet of roses on the chief's desk and in his hand he held a small leather case, open. Miss Graham knew they were both for her. The chief began to make a little speech. As he talked he rose on the balls of his feet and fell back onto his rubber heels, rose again . . . there was a sort of oratorical rhythm to it.

He spoke of Miss Graham's long and faithful service, of her loyalty, her exactitude. He said the Department would miss her. Then he presented her with the gold watch and put the great cluster of roses in her thin arms. It was the end of a half-century in the Civil Service. Her fellow-clerks, grouped about her, listened to the chief's tribute, some of them with pride, some with horror, and some with amused wonder. The old clerks, soon to retire themselves, were proud of her long record, against which they matched their own. The middle-aged ones felt a faint, sick horror. Would they too have to serve a life sentence in monotony? Would the escape they had always vaguely planned elude them? The young ones, the typists and junior clerks, were coolly amused. They shrugged their slim shoulders and whispered among themselves. Not for them, they said. Just a year or two of this while they picked up some pin money, then out they would pop into the real world, the world of competition and opportunity. They were young and arrogantly sure.

Miss Graham had meant to make a little speech of acknowledgment. Lying awake the night be-

fore, she had planned her sentences. But now something hurt in her throat and her eyes were blurred with tears. She only murmured, "Thank you. I thank you." Then they all surrounded her, shaking hands, making jokes. Some of the women fetched her hat and coat and umbrella, and went down to the door with her, to bundle her into a cab. She could not have managed the big bouquet on a street car.

At Mrs. Renshaw's boarding house, where she had lived the last six years, they were making a gala occasion of her retirement too. There were flowers on her table for dinner and ice-cream for dessert although the day was not Wednesday. Each one of the boarders stopped at her place to shake her hand and congratulate her. They wanted to know what the chief had said, and they admired her gold watch. It was very pleasant. The faint pinkness stayed in her thin cheeks and there was something youthful and eager in her dim eyes.

But after dinner the boarders drifted away, just as they always did. Some of them went to movies, some began to set up the tables for bridge,

others retired to their rooms to read or sew. Miss Graham took her flowers and went to her own neat room. She wrote a long letter to her brother who lived in Ohio. He was the only close relative she had, now. She told him all about her day.

It was strange to wake in the morning and remember that she did not have to go to work. But she got up at half past six, just as usual. Promptly at seven thirty she was seated at the breakfast table, spooning her orange. When she had finished her cereal and was cracking the shell of her self-boiled egg, the other boarders began to straggle in.

"What are you doing up so early? I thought you were a lady of leisure now," they teased her.

But in a minute or so, they forgot her. They unfolded their morning papers. Some one read a headline aloud and started a discussion of the current political scandal. Miss Graham's Occasion was over; the circle of limelight had shifted.

She had a few errands to do downtown. It was nice to do them unhurriedly; it was nice to be in the shops when most of the world was at work. The aisles were uncrowded and one could stop to

look at the merchandise displayed on counters, without being jostled. The salesgirls were pleasanter too.

At lunch time she went back to Mrs. Renshaw's. She had never had a week day lunch there before. There were a few of the married women who did not have to work and herself. The big dining-room seemed deserted and bare. Lunch itself was a pick-up meal, mostly warmed-over things from last night's dinner. Miss Graham felt a little depressed. She wondered who was lunching with Miss Satterwaite to-day and what office news Miss Satterwaite was telling over her milk and sandwiches. She wondered if they were talking of her, and of Yesterday.

In the afternoon she tried to take a little nap, but she was not used to sleeping in the day and her eyes were propped open.

Later in the week she was invited by one of the married ladies to go to the movies. It seemed very pleasant, quite a "lark," in prospect. But the lady liked to sit very far front, and the pictures hurt Miss Graham's eyes when she sat too close to them. She came away with a headache.

Days dragged their heels now, as they moved past her. She experienced the aridity of leisure. For hours at a time she had nothing to do but sit in her little boarding-house room and rock and remember. More and more she lived in the past.

She liked best to remember those first days. She had passed her examination and had got her appointment in 1875, during Grant's administration. It had been a real adventure for a woman to take a position in those days. She remembered how important and how frightened she had felt. Her brother had traveled to Washington with her and she had worn a brown woolen dress and a brown velvet hat with a little feather curling over one ear. She had been just twenty years old then. Her brother had seen that she was settled comfortably before he went back to Ohio. She had boarded with Mrs. James, in what was now the downtown section, on G Street; and she had walked to work in those days. It had not been easy to get into Mrs. James' house; one had to have references. She had been the only young person and the only unmarried person there. Mrs. James had been able to tuck her into a hall

room which was too tiny for any of her married couples. Mrs. James prided herself on the distinction of her boarders. She had a number of Army People and Navy People, and a Senator and his wife.

Those had been wonderful days, Miss Graham thought. How proud she had been to write back home to her girl friends and tell them about the important people she met every day. Once the Senator and his wife had taken her to ride in their Victoria, behind the two fat bays. She had felt quite like some one in a book.

That had been the era when a woman who worked had been open to the suspicion of being perhaps too bold, too unconventional. Miss Graham had been keenly sensitive to this doubt, and she had conducted herself always with a proud circumspection. All the boarders at Mrs. James' had spoken of her as a "most estimable young woman." She had valued their praise highly.

Once there had been a young man who worked in the Department with her, who had asked if he might call. He was an earnest, hard-working young man, but she had known that he came from

a lower class than her own. He said "ain't" and "he don't," and once she had seen him smoking a cigar as he walked down the street with a lady! She could not be sure what he might do in Mrs. James' correct parlor. So she blushed and told him "No," he could not call. Once or twice afterwards, she had regretted him faintly. But only faintly. She preferred not to stoop for romance.

There had been many things to see as the years passed. Many parades. She always bought a seat on the stands built outside the Treasury and watched the parades as they wheeled from Pennsylvania Avenue, up Fifteenth Street. That was the best vantage point. One had to put in one's application very early to get a seat there. She had always loved the martial music, the color, the thrill which one got when the cavalry passed.

She had seen many Inaugural balls too, at the old Pension building. She had a new dress made for each Inaugural ball and afterwards she loved to tell how her lace trimmings had been torn in the crowd. On New Year's Day, she went each year to the White House to the public reception. It seemed to her a patriotic duty to pay the Presi-

dent this respect, and she would stand for hours in the winding line that slowly edged its way to the White House door. Once she had been taken to an Army and Navy reception at the White House. Some Navy friends had gotten an invitation for her and had taken her with them. She could remember the brilliancy of the scene in the East Room, with all the shining uniforms under the shining crystal chandeliers.

For ten years she had stayed at Mrs. James'. Then that decorous lady had decorously died, quietly with no lingering illness. There had been quite a flutter among the boarders. Where would they go now? There was no other place like Mrs. James'. Finally the Army and Navy people moved in a body to a small, exclusive hotel. But Miss Graham could not afford this. She found another boarding place, on I Street this time. The people here were not so important, so distinguished. But they were nice, genteel people, and the house was well kept. She had stayed there until the nineties, when that too broke up. Then she had moved to a house near Dupont Circle. The city was growing fast and the Dupont Circle

neighborhood which had seemed to her "out in the country," was becoming the best residential section. But living out there made a difference in her life; she had to ride to work now. She dreaded the promiscuity of street cars, the close proximity of persons of doubtful cleanliness. But she found that "a nice class of people" patronized her car line and she adjusted herself to the new habit.

In the new century, she had had to move again. This time she went even further uptown, out on the Mount Pleasant hill. One had to live far out, in order to secure a seat on the cars in the morning. The city was getting so crowded. She did not like the new confusion, and especially she did not like the increasing number of automobiles which were taking the place of the old-time carriages. The horse and carriage had had a dignity which these snorting machines could never have, she thought. The class of people with whom one was thrown—that was changing too. At her new boarding house she never met any Army people or Navy people, or even a Congressman. And there was so little permanence. Peo-

ple seemed to be constantly coming and going. Homes that had played their part in history were being torn down and huge apartment houses erected in their places. The old aristocratic leisure and deliberation was being hustled off the streets of Washington.

Then had come the war, and the final cataclysmic destruction of old Washington. Even now she shuddered, remembering those two unspeakable years. She had felt very bitter about the Germans; she had read the atrocity stories and had believed them all; she had transferred her savings into Liberty Bonds and had been glad to go without sugar in her coffee. But it had never seemed right to her that the routine of life should be disrupted by the war. Even a World War, she thought, could have been conducted with a quiet decorum. She felt that she, a non-combatant, had been forced to endure trials comparable to those which the soldiers knew in the trenches.

Her landlady had early abandoned the effort to feed her people. They could lodge with her, she said, but she could not struggle with the labor sit-

uation and the mounting prices of food. Miss Graham had searched for another boarding place, but it seemed that all landladies were refusing table board. Miss Graham had been obliged to eat at one of the cafeterias which were springing up all over town. It had been, she felt, a degrading experience. Standing in line, with a tray, waiting for food! Using tin knives and forks, which one must always wipe on a paper napkin because one could never be sure of their cleanliness! But, worst of all, the people! To her dying day, Miss Graham would always regard as the chief horror of the war, the Washington war workers. Those unspeakable girls, with their painted faces, their transparent blouses, their exposed legs, their inappropriate fur coats! And not only must she eat with them, but she must also work with them. They invaded even the older Departments. They were flippant about their work and they chewed gum and flirted. Miss Graham's very soul felt nauseated as she remembered them.

But the war had ended and though Washington had never regained its old dignity, she had per-

sonally recaptured a certain peace. The year after the war she had discovered Mrs. Renshaw, who, it seemed, was willing to take paying guests whom she would promise to feed as well as lodge. Of course it was not like those first days at Mrs. James'. But nothing had been like that, since Mrs. James had died. The people here at Mrs. Renshaw's were decent, fairly genteel, she thought. And the house was clean and efficiently managed. She did not know that she could do better.

With only her memories to keep her busy, she began to grow restless. She went back to the office one day. She found that they had put Miss Wilkins in her place, Miss Wilkins who was notoriously inaccurate and forgetful. It distressed her to see her work, into which she had put fifty years of pride, botched and marred. She had always kept the vouchers so immaculately clean. Miss Wilkins spilled ink, as she checked, and her nervous fingers curled up the edges of the stiff paper. Miss Graham never went back to the office again.

She had no real friends, only acquaintances.

Some of these acquaintances began to urge her, now that summer was upon the town, to take a long vacation.

"You have nothing to keep you here in the heat," they said.

It was true. She began to think of places where she might go. When she had been in office she had always spent her thirty days annual leave at some well-recommended seashore hotel. But she could not afford that now, especially for the whole summer. Her pension was sixty dollars a month, and even with her savings that only made her income a hundred dollars a month. She would have to go to some quiet place in the country.

She found the place, finally. It was in the foothills of the Blue Ridge mountains. The people who told her about it said the house they would recommend was kept by a widow, a lady of a good Virginia family, and her guests were all "nice people." The food was very good too, they said. Miss Graham wrote to the widow and engaged a room with her for the summer months.

Her train was an hour late and supper was almost over, when she was shown to her place at a

small table. It was a table for four, but the others had evidently finished. They were probably in the group of ladies she had passed on the front porch. She had liked their looks.

After supper she went out on the porch, and modestly took a seat in one of the dark corners. It was nice and cool here, and even in the night shadows one got a hint of the fine view which the porch must command in the daytime.

The lady next to her stopped rocking and courteously inquired if she had just come and whether she planned to stay for any length of time. When Miss Graham said she had come for the summer, the lady murmured something about "how nice," and when Miss Graham described her hard trip on the delayed train, the lady clicked her tongue sympathetically. She seemed a kind person. Presently they exchanged names and she asked where Miss Graham lived.

"In Washington," Miss Graham said.

"In Washington!" The lady's voice made an exclamation of it.

"Have you lived there long?"

"Fifty years," answered Miss Graham.

"Fifty years in Washington! Only think of the things you must have seen and the great men. . . ."

The lady turned and put her hand on the arm of the neighbor on her other side.

"Miss Armstrong, I want to introduce you to Miss Graham," she said. "Miss Graham has come to stay all the summer, too. And only think of it, she has lived in Washington fifty years!"

"Really?" breathed Miss Armstrong, with gratifying deference.

"But, my dear, what a wonderful life you must have had," she said to Miss Graham.

Miss Graham drew her erect figure a little straighter. Through a bright mist she could see the months to come, with these friendly, interested and "nice" people. How much she could tell them and how eager they would be to hear it! She was very glad she had come to this place. The past weeks of lonely inactivity fell away.

"Yes. I have had a very wonderful life," she said complacently.

DEMOTED

DEMOTED

Late in the afternoon a messenger brought him one of the ominous sealed envelopes. They had been falling to the lot of the efficient and the inefficient alike; but somehow it had never seemed possible that *he* could get one. A sense of cold whiteness spread through his body as he received it.

"I sho' am sorry to bring you this-here, Mr. Gaynor."

With softly slurred syllables, the messenger proffered the facile sympathy of his race.

Philip Gaynor tried to smile casually, but the muscles of his mouth were stiff. He could feel himself grimace. The other clerks in the room were suddenly very busy, conspicuously oblivious . . . he knew they were covertly watching him as he slit the envelope and looked inside. He did not know how long he stared at the few typed lines on the enclosed sheet of official paper. For a

while, the words zigzagged across the page, so that he could not read them. After they steadied, it took him some time to take in their full meaning. As he was folding the paper to reinsert it in the envelope, Fred O'Neal, who had the desk next to his, came over and put a friendly hand on his shoulder.

"I hope you haven't lost out, Gaynor," he said.

Again Gaynor could feel himself grimace as he tried to smile. His voice, which he meant to make quite casual, came cracked and thin.

"No, I haven't lost out. Just dropped a grade or two," he said.

Immediately the assumed detachment of the other clerks was cast aside. They crowded around Gaynor's desk; they all talked at once.

It was an outrage, they said. It was nothing but dirty politics. Why, the best men in the office were getting demotions. There was Smithson, now—he had got his yesterday—everybody knew what a fine record Smithson had. And Miss Nelson, one of the most accurate clerks in the division. . . .

Mrs. Frick came into the room. Her eyes

were big and wide; two red spots burned on her sallow cheeks.

"What d'you think?" she said. "I've just been talking to Mr. Brown of the personnel office and he says they've dropped five and demoted ten to-day!"

In her excitement she had not noticed the unusual grouping about Gaynor's desk. Now she saw it.

"Why . . . what . . ." she stammered.

"Gaynor, dropped a grade," Fred O'Neal explained.

"Oh!" her voice was hushed.

"I'm very, very sorry," she said and two slow tears ran down her withered cheeks and dropped on the black sateen apron she wore during working hours.

The slatted wooden door swung briskly inward and in a sudden panic of apprehension all the clerks scurried back to their desks. But it was only the messenger, returning.

He walked up to Gaynor's desk.

"Mr. Munn wants to see you right away, Mr. Gaynor," he said.

"Mr. Munn," Gaynor repeated stupidly. He pushed his chair back from the desk and rose unsteadily to his feet. As he was starting through the door he remembered. He had on his alpaca working coat, with the split sleeve and the patch on the shoulder. He could not go to see Mr. Munn in that coat. Slowly he returned and lifted his blue serge coat from the hook back of his desk. The blue serge was shabby and shapeless; he brushed some lint from the sleeves as he walked down the corridor.

Mr. Munn's office was a great, square room, with a pleasant southern exposure. It was furnished in mahogany, polished to a gleaming perfection. In addition to Mr. Munn's flat-topped mahogany desk, there was a mahogany bookcase filled with fat, leather-bound reference books, four mahogany chairs for visitors and a small mahogany table on which rested a silver water pitcher and some tumblers on a tray. The silver pitcher was always beaded with frost from the ice packed inside. A thick, dark green carpet covered the floor, muffling all footsteps.

As Gaynor entered, Mr. Munn was leaning

back in his swivel chair, puffing meditatively at a mild, expensively banded cigar. Blue smoke drifted about his fat figure and through the haze his sleek, impassive face was like the face of a complacent idol, incense bathed,

"Ah, Gaynor. Good afternoon. Have a seat, won't you?"

His voice was conciliatory, almost purring.

Gaynor took the indicated chair and waited.

"Well, I suppose you got a notice, to-day," Mr. Munn began briskly.

"Yes, sir. I just got it," Gaynor answered. It was hard for him to talk. Something seemed the matter with his tongue; it was thick and swollen and his mouth was dry. He wondered vaguely if he could be in for some sort of stroke.

"I'm very sorry about this, Gaynor, very sorry," his superior officer continued to purr. "But you must remember that you are one of many. One of many. You see," he drew his brows together in a portentous frown, "we've got to economize. Orders are out for economy and we have to cut everywhere we can. You are one of many. One of many," he repeated again.

"But the reason I sent for you, Gaynor, was to explain the thing to you. I don't want you to feel badly about it. Or discouraged. You must not let yourself be discouraged. I hope we shan't see any letting down in your work."

Gaynor cleared his throat.

"Just what will my work be now, sir?" he asked. Mr. Munn looked puzzled.

"What will your work be?" he echoed.

"Yes. My notice of demotion states that I am dropped from the grade of 'law clerk' to the grade of 'clerk.' Doesn't that mean that I am to be taken off the examination of claims?"

Mr. Munn showed some confusion.

"Why—er—no. You are to do the same work. You will be a law clerk in fact, even though we can only pay you as a clerk. It's all a matter of economy, Gaynor, just as I told you. Economy."

His voice was less purring now; he was growing a little impatient.

"I see," Gaynor said. "I see." He rose to go.

"Will that be all, then, Mr. Munn?" he asked.

"Yes, that's all to-day. But remember what I've said to you. Don't allow yourself to be discouraged."

The fat chief took another puff at his cigar, closing the interview on the optimistic note.

Gaynor tried to leave the room with some dignity. He straightened his shoulders as he walked out, and the cheap, ready-made coat, adjusted through years of wear to bent shoulders, fell into queer wrinkles.

Back in his own room, he found his fellow clerks gathered in a cowed group, whispering. They had frightened eyes. Who could tell what might happen with the morrow? Since the thing had struck Gaynor, it had for them an immediate terror.

"What did he say to you? What did he want with you?" they pelted Gaynor with questions, on his return.

Gaynor's shoulders were bent again; now that he was out of Mr. Munn's range of vision he no longer attempted dignity of carriage. His eyes were bewildered and he ran his hand through his hair in an uncertain gesture.

"He said it was a matter of economy. They expect me to do the same work with less pay," he said.

Fred O'Neal laughed bitterly.

"Economy!" he echoed. "Why they put in another new man to-day with the title of 'attorney' and they are paying *him* four thousand a year. 'Attorney!' Why, he's never seen the inside of a law school, let alone a court, Geof Brown says. But he did yeoman service in the last political campaign, and this is his reward. They are collecting his four thousand out of the demotions they are handing to the men who really do the work. Economy, My God!"

"Yes, I know," Gaynor said patiently. "Sometimes it's economy they talk, and sometimes it's expansion and progress. But it all comes to the same thing. Politics. Don't you think I know that? But I couldn't tell Munn I understood it. I can't afford to *lose* my job."

He walked over to his desk and began to shuffle the papers that lay in his wire basket. He could not work any more to-day; he could not see the words that were printed on the claim sheets. But

he had to pretend to work, to escape from the curiosity and the sympathy of his fellowworkers. His spirit was too sore to be touched.

In their way the others understood. They returned to their own desks and the remaining minutes of the working-day were soundless, save for the scratching of pens and the noise of turned pages. When the half-past four bell rang for quitting time, Gaynor waited until they had all gone, so that he could be alone. When the sound of departing footsteps had at length died away down the corridor, he closed his own desk and put on his shabby overcoat and pulled his battered soft hat down over his eyes.

The air felt cold and wretchedly damp, as he emerged from the over-heated building. He turned up the patched collar of his coat and fumbled in his pocket for his woolen gloves. Instead of following his beaten path to the suburban car which would take him home, he turned southward, toward the Mall and the Speedway. He wanted to get away from people. It seemed to him that if he could once get away, into complete solitude, then perhaps he could catch some of these

mad phrases which raced through his brain, and could think them into sentences. On a cold, raw day like this, he felt sure the river drive would be deserted, so with his head bent against the wind, he walked toward the Speedway.

"Four hundred dollars less a year. Four hundred dollars less." That was the worst of the phrases.

"Thelma will have to have an operation. Thelma will have to have an operation. The doctor says she will have to have one, Phil." That was the echo of his wife's frightened voice.

He could see his wife's face, strained and tired. The fair hair that she had once been so proud of, drawn tight back from her forehead into a hard knot, because she had no time to "fuss" with it. The faded gingham she always wore in the house, to save her cloth dresses. Another phrase caromed through his mind.

". . . a decent dress for less than fifty dollars."

He had passed two of the office stenographers, talking in the corridor. And one of them had said,

"Aw, you can't get a decent dress for less than fifty dollars."

Why, his wife had had but one new suit in four years and that had cost twenty-five dollars! How he hated these girls who worked for "spending money"; who came to the office dressed for a party, with their faces rouged and powdered and their lips covered with red salve. How unfair it was that they should be paid almost as much as he would now get, though his job meant life itself for four people!

"Unfair. Unfair. Unfair." The word beat time for his thoughts. It was all unfair. All of life.

Four hundred dollars less a year. They couldn't do it. They were living down to the bone, now. He must get some more money somehow. Another job. But what could he get? Eighteen years in the Government service was no recommendation for an outside job. People on the outside did not want to employ ex-Government clerks. They said government work unfitted a man for anything else. Well, perhaps

they were right. He thought of his own work. How many things he had gone without, what dogged years of night study he had put in, to get his law education, so that he could be advanced to the rating of "law clerk." In the ten years since he had been advanced to that rating, he must have passed on claims running up into the millions. Yes, he was sure of it. Into the millions. And his decisions had very rarely been reversed. His work must have some value. Well, they had valued it at two thousand a year, and now they would value it at sixteen hundred a year. Four hundred dollars a year less. Four hundred dollars a year less. . . . But what value could his work have outside the Government? Some men, he knew, had used their Government experience in prosecuting claims against the Government. But you had to have capital to set up an office for yourself, and you had to have some sort of pull to get the claims. Capital and pull. He had neither. No, if he left the Government, all he could hope to get would be some poorly paid clerical job on the outside.

Trapped. Trapped. He remembered a rat

he had once seen in a trap. He was caught like that rat. And Edith. Edith was trapped too.

How pretty she had been when he married her, and how happy and hopeful. He ought never to have married her, that was certain. If they had not married, perhaps neither of them would be trapped now. But she had been so pretty. Her skin had been so satin-soft . . . her white throat so warmly lovely . . . her bright blue eyes so challenging. And how perfumed and soft had been the nights of that first summer. Ah, that had been the first trap of all. Nature's best trap . . . the one that never fails to snap its teeth.

But for all her prettiness, she had not been a doll-baby wife. She had from the very first borne more than her share of the successive burdens. Much as she loved pretty clothes and gay amusements, she had from the beginning been willing to go without them, so that the money could be saved for more vital things. For paying off the second trust on the house, the bare, ugly little box house they had bought in an unprosperous suburb, and which the real estate agent had falsely sworn would be worth double some day. For his night

school bills while he was learning to be a law clerk. For hospital bills when the two babies came, and for doctor's bills when little Phil had adenoids and tonsils, and when Thelma had scarlet fever. For expensive invalid's food, when Edith's mother had come to live with them, or rather to die with them . . . for she had been slowly dying all the five years she had spent in their home. For neat school clothes for the children. And now for Thelma's operation. . . .

"Thelma must have an operation." That sentence was back again. God! If he could only get his mind clear.

Trapped. There was nothing he could do, nothing Edith could do. No way out.

He sat down on a bench, heedless of the cold. He was so numb inside that the cold outside did not seem to matter.

At his feet the river ran sluggishly. It was cold and gray. The river drive was deserted, desolate.

No way out.

He looked at the river. He could slip in and no one would be the wiser. It would be days be-

fore they would find his body, probably. A way out!

But it was only a thought, not an impulse. He knew that this was not a way out for him. A man has to live, before he can dare death. A man who has lived may plunge into death, as another scarlet adventure. But Gaynor had no sense of adventure. Death, for him, was but the perpetuation of a gray monotony. It was life, as he had known life, stretching into infinity. And he believed in infinity. People said there was no after-life, especially no hell. But he was afraid of the God who had made this life; he believed Him entirely capable of making hell beyond. No, he could not take that way out. It offered no guarantee of escape.

Far off, a shrill whistle blew. Six o'clock. He thought of Edith, waiting dinner for him, trying to keep things warm, without letting them get hard and scorched. She would be worried too. He had never stayed in town as late as this.

He jumped to his feet and turned northward. He walked very fast, the wind at his back now.

Once a long, shuddering sob tore its way through his body. It hurt, like a sharp pain.

It was half-past six when he reached his car line. There was a car standing there now, while a long line of passengers climbed aboard. But he really ought to telephone to let Edith know he was all right. He turned back toward a drug store, where there would be a telephone booth. Then he remembered. Every penny would have to be squeezed now.

"Four hundred dollars a year less. Thelma . . . an operation . . . the doctor says . . . trapped." The phrases were beginning with their mad circle, again.

He swung onto the step of the car, just as it started. Edith would worry but he could not afford to telephone her.

CHERRY BLOSSOMS

CHERRY BLOSSOMS

In the spring, the railroad companies put on special excursions to Washington; and when the cherry blossoms are in bloom, their well-advertised beauty lures extra thousands of patriotic tourists. By sitting up all night in a day coach, excursionists from eastern cities can manage a week-end in the nation's capital very cheaply indeed.

Six of the girls in Bloomberg's shoe factory went down to Washington on one of these week-end trips from New Jersey in the spring of 1922. On Monday morning the factory was showered with picture postcards. There were views of the White House, the Capitol at night, the Monument, the Lincoln Memorial, the Treasury Building; and scrawled under the pictures were black, badly blotted messages, written with leaky fountain pens—"Oh, Boy," "Wish you were here," "It's a dead town but we're waking 'em up."

Myra Davis got only one card. Myra was not

very popular with the girls at the factory. In the sales department, where she worked as a stenographer, they thought she gave herself airs, "and why, God knows," they always added. But with the good-natured tolerance that is born of holiday spirit Rosa Graziani sent her a card. It was a view of the Tidal Basin—just a flash of blue water, a curve of cherry trees in bloom, and in the background the Monument, slim and tall. The card was crudely colored, but even the daubs of pink and blue could not utterly destroy the delicacy of the cherry blossoms. Myra loved delicate beauty. She took the card home with her and stuck it in the mirror of her dresser.

The Davis house was on the wrong side of the railroad tracks, and very close to the tracks too. The family had moved there in 1917, when the breach had so alarmingly widened between the cost of living and Tom Davis's salary. Tom Davis was a bookkeeper; he had kept books for the same firm for twenty odd years, and his shoulders were stooped from leaning over the great ledgers. Myra could remember when his shoulders had been only a little bowed, and when

the family had lived in a neat little red brick house on a neat, elm-shaded street, and she had felt sorry for the "poor" children at school, the children whose fathers were carpenters or plumbers or painters. Now those children wore delicate silks and luxurious furs and rode in high powered motor cars, while the Davises lived by the railroad tracks and Myra Davis worked in Bloomberg's shoe factory!

In the mornings, as she dressed, the locomotive whistles shrieked outside her window and the room was gray with train smoke which had drifted in with the night's ventilation. After she stuck the picture of the cherry blossoms in her mirror, it became a sort of focus for her discontent. Every morning she would look at it with a fresh passion of rebellion. The crude print suggested a loveliness which could only remind her of the unloveliness of her life. It reminded her of the hideous sounds and the more hideous smells from the train yard; of the drab monotony of the streets through which she walked to her work; of the grimy room where she typed all day, under artificial lights; of the loud, coarse voices and the painted faces

. . . ah, the ugliness of the people, that was the worst ugliness of all! Except herself, the girls in the sales department were all foreigners. She was the only one of old American stock. Most of them came from southeastern Europe. Under their heavy "make-up" their skins were swarthy and the blood surged in thick, warm streams. Their lips were full, ardent; their eyes were warm and bold; their breasts rounded in generous curves. She felt coolly alien. She loathed everything about them; their voluptuous maturity of person, their coarse, quick repartee, their aggressive way of going after the things they wanted. She shunned any friendly contact with them and drew her cool reticence about her like a thin cloak.

After she had smoothed the covers on her white cot-bed, had straightened the imitation ivory things on her dresser, had gathered up her hat and cloak and purse, then just before closing the door on her tidied room, she would always look back once more at the picture of the cherry blossoms. Then she would go down to breakfast. Her father and her two brothers would be at the table before her. They liked hot cakes with syrup

for breakfast, and sausages cooked with gravy. She only took cereal and coffee, so she could afford to be a little late. Her father ate with a patient doggedness, as he did everything. The two boys ate with a young wolfishness. Tom, Jr., had a job now, in a paper factory, but he still studied at night school. His pale eyes were always swollen in the mornings and the rims were red from reading fine print late at night. Fred was still in school. Her mother never sat down to breakfast until every one had gone. She had to keep moving back and forth between the dining room and the kitchen, bringing fresh supplies of hot cakes. She was thin and gray and her mouth drooped in a permanent pathos. She had a new story each morning of some fresh crime committed by one of the neighbors against household law and order. "Dirty foreigners," she called them. Her husband and her sons were inattentive, but Myra always listened. She knew how her mother felt about dirt and untidiness.

"They live like pigs in a pen," she would say when her mother finished telling her story. It was a sort of morning ritual with them.

Some months after Rosa Graziani had sent her the cherry blossom postcard, she saw a small news item, buried in the evening paper, announcing a Civil Service examination to be given in her State during September. The examination was for stenographic positions in the Government Departments at Washington.

Something seemed to flash and then to click in her brain. Could it be possible for her to pass such an examination? Well, why not? She had a good stenographic speed and she knew she could do much better work than those stupid letters she took at Bloomberg's—"Yours of the 1st instant received and contents noted."

She wrote to Washington for information and she got out her old shorthand text book and asked her mother to dictate to her in the evenings.

A few weeks after the examination, she received a long, official envelope from Washington, and inside was her rating. Eighty-four. That was not so high, but she had been informed that the Civil Service quota for the State was not filled at the time, so her chance for appointment was good. She went about her life in a dream but she hated

the ugliness more than ever, now. With escape in sight, she could afford to hate passionately. Before, she had been a little afraid to let herself go.

In November she got her appointment. She left on a Sunday and all the family went to the train to see her off. Fred gave her a box of candy, a cheap box with a dirty red bow of ribbon on top. Tom, Jr., bought her a magazine to read on the train. Her father looked at her with a wistful wonder which made her feel sad. Her mother cried a little, but not with any distress, because she was really very proud. Of course she would miss Myra, but she liked being able to tell her friends, "My daughter has gone to Washington; she has a position in the Government now." She had always been so ashamed that Myra should work in a factory.

Myra arrived in Washington in the late afternoon, a glittering autumn afternoon. As she emerged from the great white station and looked across the wind-swept plaza to the majestic beauty of the Capitol, she had a sharp sense of emancipation. Her spirit had escaped from reality into a dream of color and space. She stood for a long

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time under one of the great arches of the station's colonnade, drinking in the freedom of beauty. To the left of the Capitol, she could see a small golden dome, like a glittering accent in a long white marble sentence. That would be the Congressional Library, she thought. And far to the right the Monument, touched with a faint pink by the western sun, probed the unbelievable blue of the sky.

But presently she roused herself, picked up her suit case and consulted a slip of paper which she held in one hand and which bore the address of the room she had engaged, through the Y.W.C.A. She showed the slip to a man in uniform, who directed her to the right street car. There was a sign on the front of the car which read "Mt. Pleasant." She liked the sound of it. She liked the word "pleasant"; it was cool and clean in its connotations.

After leaving the station, she rode for a time through an uninspiring section of the city . . . blocks of frame houses with many little darkies playing in front of them . . . small, tawdry shops, covered with advertisements of soft drinks

and cheap crackers . . . stodgy red brick houses with signs stuck in the windows—"Rooms for Rent," "Boarders," or "Madame X, Psychic Palmist," "Madame Y, Astrologist." She was disappointed that there should be any ugliness here, but still it did not seem as terrible as the ugliness at home because always there was the sense of space, of possible escape. The broad streets did that.

Then at the Patent Office the car turned into the shopping district and presently it turned again and then again, past broad parks and monumental white buildings, and fine, solid old houses which looked as though they might be steeped in history. Finally there was a long, rising grade; she could hear the grinding of the car brakes and she thought this must be the "Mount Pleasant" of the sign. The houses they passed were all modern now and there were a number of huge apartment houses. Once she noticed a spreading estate, unabsorbed by the city's progress, with a low-built, simple old home in the center of it. They were up the hill now, and running through a section of increased activity. Stores and moving pictures and

apartment houses. Pavements crowded with Sunday afternoon promenaders and nurses pushing baby carriages.

The conductor, who had promised to let her off at the right stop, touched her on the shoulder.

"Here you are, lady," he said. His voice was soft, oddly slurred, and friendly. She liked it. After she had gotten off the car she repeated his phrase to herself.

"Here you are, lady." It seemed to her significant. This *was* the place for a lady, this spacious, unhurried, *American* city.

The room she had taken was in an apartment house. The Y.W.C.A. people had written her that "a very nice young married couple" had an extra room in their apartment which they were willing to rent to the right sort of person. The room was small, but bright and airy and immaculately clean. She liked the young woman from whom she rented it, and she liked the young woman's husband; they were nice people, quiet in their manner, in their dress, in their personalities. They were old-stock Americans, like herself.

Both the husband and wife worked in the Government, they told her.

Promptly at nine the next morning, she reported to the appointment clerk in the Department to which she had been assigned. She was received with a courteous formality and taken by one of the under-clerks to the office where she was to work; there, the under-clerk introduced her to a Division Chief, who in turn escorted her to the room where her desk was placed, and introduced her with much punctiliousness to the three other people in the room. It was all very different from the crude, business directness of Bloomberg's. Her fellow clerks treated her like a guest. They brought the supplies for her desk and rang for a messenger to get a clean towel and an individual drinking glass. They consulted her preferences as to the angle of her desk, as to how she liked the light to come over her shoulder, and asked her politely if she felt the draft from the window.

It was nearly noon before she actually got to work. Then some one brought her a sheaf of printed forms, each of which had to be inserted

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in her typewriter for the addition of names and addresses. She got the names from a long list which was supplied her.

The three clerks in the room with her were all of them much older than she; but she did not mind that. She liked the orderliness, the quiet. Once or twice she thought of the noisy room at Bloomberg's, the loud laughter, the gum chewing, the familiarity. She drew deep breaths of the peace which surrounded her now.

At half-past twelve a bell rang loudly and every one promptly stopped work. It seemed that all of them brought their lunches in little paper bags—all except Myra. But one of them remembered that there was a Miss Faison in the room two doors down the corridor who went out for her lunches, so she promptly went in search of Miss Faison, brought her in and introduced her to Myra. She was a pale, blond girl, a little too thin; she had a gentle voice and a sweet manner. Myra went with her to a neighboring cafeteria, where they lunched on salad and rolls and coffee.

After this they went to lunch together each day. Myra liked the companionship; it was pleasant

and undemanding, very unlike the intimacies of the girls at Bloomberg's.

Myra learned the names of the different clerks in her office and in the Division very quickly. She had never mastered the names at Bloomberg's—unpronounceable foreign names, which her memory automatically rejected. But the names here were English. She wondered about that—why the Government ranks should be filled almost entirely by old-stock Americans. She concluded that it was because of the money consideration. The Civil Service held out no hope of large profit. One's twice-a-month check was perfectly sure, for the Government could never go bankrupt; but the size of the check would always be limited. Even the men in executive positions in the Departments, and the men holding posts which required scientific knowledge of a high sort, made less money than a successful shoe salesman. That was it, Myra decided contemptuously. The aliens who had invaded America cared only for the one thing—money. Public service could mean nothing to them, if it held no opportunity for graft. And graft went with the elective and the big appointive

positions; there was no chance for the Government clerk to sell his influence because he had no influence to sell. He was only a cog in a great wheel. Myra was proud to be such a cog, because she thought of the dignity of the slow-moving wheel which turned the power of a nation. But, she reflected bitterly, the new Americans had no national pride; they knew only personal greed.

When they had lunched together daily for some three months, Myra and Miss Faison began to call each other by first names; Myra and Edna they became. And after another month, Edna proposed that they take a small apartment together and keep house. She blushed as she explained that she had a friend who took her out a great deal in the evenings and she had no place ever to ask him in, living as she did in one room in some one's else apartment. Now if she and Myra took an apartment together, they could have a room fitted up as a living room and they could have company whenever they wished. She could ask Jack in and Myra could ask her friends. Myra confessed that she had no one who needed to be "asked in"; but she liked the idea of the

housekeeping apartment. So they went flat hunting, and finally found one with two reasonably large rooms and a tiny kitchenette fitted with all sorts of trick appliances.

They moved in during March and Spring found them nicely settled. Housekeeping was absurdly easy, for they had a delicatessen shop just around the corner, and the city was so marvelously free from the soft-coal nuisance that dusting was child's play. Both of them took a pride in having their surroundings attractive, and they spent all the money they could squeeze out of their salaries on pretty things for the flat—a new picture or a lamp shade or a table runner or a potted plant.

Every Sunday Jack came and took Edna out somewhere; to the movies if it were a rainy Sunday, or to the country in his roadster if the weather were good. This left Myra alone and sometimes she felt the loneliness. But there was so much to interest her, so much that she had not yet seen, that usually she got through the day very well.

On the first Sunday after the cherry trees bloomed, she rode in a bus down to the Speedway

to see them. It was really the cherry blossoms that had brought her to Washington, she reflected. They were a sort of symbol to her and more than anything else she wanted to see them. Although she went very early in the forenoon, she found many tourists already there. They were snapping pictures of one another, posed under the trees, and they talked in loud, unmodulated voices. They made her remember Bloomberg's. But even the tourists could not spoil the miracle of beauty.

Myra retreated from the rim of the Tidal Basin, out of the immediate path of tourists, and sat on the grass under one of the trees, with her face tilted to its burden of fragile loveliness. Ever so often the wind would shake a few of the blossoms into her lap. She held her palms upturned to catch them. The cool delicacy of them seemed to her the most exquisite thing she had ever experienced.

She had been there perhaps an hour—she had lost all count of time—when a pleasant voice, with neatly clipped syllables, broke in upon her drifting dreams.

"Good morning, Miss Davis."

She turned her head and recognized George Benton, one of the correspondence clerks in the legal division at her Department. Once or twice he had brought her his letters to type and she had found him easy to please and appreciative of her careful work. She smiled at him now, and he sat down on the grass beside her. He was thin and blond, his hair was receding a bit from his high forehead; he had finely cut, Nordic features and a small nervous wrinkle between his eyebrows. Myra liked his type and she liked the formal courtesy of his manner. They talked about the beauty of the cherry trees and presently Myra found herself telling him how the blossoms had lured her to Washington.

It was easy to tell him; he understood just how she felt. In return, he told her the story of his own coming into the Civil Service. He had had a job in a steel plant in Pittsburgh. They had told him it was a job with possibilities but he had hated the push and the cruelty of business. Other men who liked the life had gone ahead of him and after a while he had quietly decided to withdraw.

"I suppose I haven't any ambition," he said, "but why should every one have the same ambition? After all, the only thing one gets by climbing to the top of the ladder is space and room to breathe. And I have got that by simply stepping off the ladder and refusing to climb."

He laughed and Myra laughed.

When it was time for her to go, he asked her to let him take her home in his Ford. It was parked somewhere around, he said, with a wide gesture. They found the coupé "somewhere around" and went for a long ride on the Speedway before he finally took her home. Then she remembered that Edna was bringing Jack to dinner that day and that there would be plenty to eat, so she invited him to join the party. She enjoyed the dinner much more than if she had played her usual part of gooseberry.

After that, he came to see her with increasing frequency. At the end of a month or so, he came with the regularity that marked Jack's attentions to Edna. They had a sort of weekly ritual. On certain nights they went to the big movie theaters downtown. On other evenings, they went to ride,

always winding up at the same little shop where one could get French ices and *petits fours*. The waitress learned to recognize them and filled their order without having to be told.

By late summer they had reached a sort of informal "understanding" and when autumn came they were definitely engaged, so that she could write her mother about it. The engagement had developed naturally, gently, with no disturbing suggestion of passion. Myra liked that; passion had always seemed to her not quite clean. Once, as she had turned a sudden corner in a dark hall at Bloomberg's, she had come upon a girl and a man locked in an ardent embrace, and the sight had remained with her as a sick distasteful memory for days afterwards. But George was as undemonstrative as she was herself. Now that she wore his ring, he sometimes kissed her good night, but they were tender, gentle kisses.

During the winter, on the nights when they were not at the movies, they played bridge with Edna and Jack and after the bridge game was over the four of them would make something hot in a chafing dish. Time passed pleasantly

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enough. Still, she was becoming conscious of a certain creeping monotony. The routine of her work was insistent. She wrote the same form letters over and over again. Nothing varied but the names and the addresses. She and Edna went to the same place for lunch each day. In the evenings she and George repeated the same pleasures. And all about her she could feel the pressure of sameness. As she went to work in the mornings, she was a part of a tide of people going to the same kind of work, a tide which poured itself into the great white prisons from which there could be no escape until the hour when the tide turned. At four-thirty she was poured out again with the ebbing tide. The streets were filled then with thousands of her fellow clerks, all of them fagged and dispirited with the strain of seven hours' monotony. Sometimes she wished she could breast the tide; that she could go to work in the evening and come away in the morning!

When she had first come to Washington, she had thought of it as a white city . . . all white and dazzling. Now she knew that it was gray. Unending grayness.

George felt that they ought to set a date for their marriage; that it was time for some definiteness of arrangement. But the engagement was still drifting when Cherry Blossom time came again. They drove, one Sunday morning, down to see the blossoms. They parked the car and went on foot to their first meeting place under the trees. George lighted a cigarette, and they sat in silent contentment under the canopy of beauty. Then George broke the silence.

"I've a piece of good news, Myra," he said.

She looked at him, faintly curious.

"I'm getting a promotion at the end of the month," he told her. "That makes twenty-two hundred and fifty a year. Don't you think we had better celebrate by deciding on a date for the Lohengrin march?"

He was pleased, boyishly pleased, with the small increase in salary and Myra tried to share his pleasure. But all the time an uncomfortable memory was tugging at her mind. She tried to bring her thoughts to the question he had raised, the fixing of a marriage day. There were so many things to decide, however, before it could be fixed.

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First of all, they had to choose between two possibilities of married life. They could plan for her to keep her job and that decision would mean that life could go on much as it did now. They could have the Ford and three movies a week and presentable clothes; they could dine out occasionally, go to an occasional theater, and take an inexpensive trip out of town each summer. She knew a number of Government couples who lived this way; the people from whom she had rented her room when she first came to Washington had planned their life in that fashion.

Or they could begin differently. They could buy a house on the instalment plan, a cheap house in one of the commuting suburbs. She could give up her job and devote her whole time to keeping the house and making a garden and cutting all the economical corners. She knew a number of Government couples who lived in this way too, so she could see into the future if she and George should choose this life. George would get shabby and stoop shouldered and he would bring home an armful of queer knobby bundles each evening and take into town each morning a list of errands to be

done before he returned. She would stay at home because she would never have clothes to go to any of the gay places. But eventually they would own a home, and they would have children.

Suddenly that faint, nagging memory became vivid! Photographically she could see a day, years back, when she herself had been a child, and her father had come home with good news. He had had a raise—five dollars a week added to his salary! He had been boyishly pleased about it, just as George was pleased now. She remembered how he had laughed and had tweaked her curls; how proudly he had repeated just what the head of his firm had said to him about his loyalty and his faithful service. Her mother had been pleased too and had written home that very night to tell her own people about it. And, oh, how excited she, herself, and Tom, Jr., had been and what things they had planned to do with their share of the new riches! Even little Fred had spoken largely of buying a whole bag of all-day suckers. But, after all, how quickly that extra five a week had been absorbed into the small running expenses of the household. It had gone into

coal and school books and woolen gloves and blankets and, strange to say, it had not seemed to produce any additional supplies of these commodities. Mother had explained that that was because everything cost so much more than it had used to cost.

In the light of this recaptured memory, Myra looked at George and now she could see him and could see their future with a cold clarity of vision. It would be a future of pittances. That was what life on a small salary meant. That was the meaning of the gray monotony she had lately come to realize in Washington life. Washington was a city of salaried men and women. They walked in a sort of lock-step from one small promotion to another and they could never know the scarlet drama of success or failure. Beauty was thrown over the city like a silken coverlet, but when you lifted the fringed edge, underneath you would find patched sheets and a darned pillow slip!

If she and George had children . . . if there were a little Myra, what would her life be? It was the thought of that little Myra, caught in the

ugliness of poverty, that threw her into a sudden panic. She jumped to her feet.

"Come, George, let's go home," she said in a strange, choked voice.

George looked up lazily, through curling rings of cigarette smoke.

"Why do you want to go so early? I thought you loved it here, under the cherry trees," he protested.

"I've had enough of cherry blossoms," she said slowly.

The small, habitual frown between his brows deepened with bewilderment. But still he did not move.

Myra looked at him. He seemed oddly far away, unreal. But she had to make him come with her.

"My head aches," she said, "I want to go home."

Immediately he jumped to his feet. He was always beautifully considerate of the least little ache or pain she might mention.

That afternoon she packed all her personal

belongings in a frenzy of hurry. She left a note for Edna, who had driven over to Baltimore with Jack and would not be back until the evening. In the note she said that she had been suddenly called home, and she enclosed a check to pay for her share of the next month's rent. After a month she knew Edna could find another girl to share the apartment, so that would be fair enough. Then she wrote a letter to George, a longer letter, incoherent but final. She packed the ring he had given her, a modest solitaire diamond, into the jeweler's box in which it had come to her, and left it in Edna's care for him. Then she caught the evening train and went home. She could send her resignation to the office later, she thought.

Her family greeted her with disapproving amazement. They could not understand at all . . . why, she had written that she liked everything so much, and she had seemed so happy in her engagement . . . what *could* be the trouble? Myra did not attempt to explain. She only said over and over:

"I got tired of it."

The very next day she went down to Bloom-

berg's to get her old job back, if possible. They gave her a better one. They seemed impressed by the fact that she had been in Washington, in the Government, and they gave her secretarial work, putting her in the sales manager's office.

The sales manager was a new man; he had not been there when she had worked at Bloomberg's before. He was big and thick-set; he had curly black hair and quick black eyes and hands which were oddly deft when one considered their pudginess. His name was John Peterson, but she knew that he had no English blood. Later she learned that his name had originally been Jan Petrowski, and that he had had it legally altered to the English version.

When she was first brought into his office, his quick eyes swept her person with a comprehensive glance. He tried her out immediately with dictation. After the second letter had been submitted to him, he said:

"You'll do."

There was a snap about his work, a new snap to all the work at Bloomberg's since he had taken over the sales department. Almost every day she

was forced to recognize some new manifestation of his shrewdness, his ability. But hers was a grudging recognition. It was difficult for her to concede intelligence to a man who wore a conspicuous diamond ring.

He recognized her ability very promptly. He was planning a new line of publicity for Bloomberg's shoes, and he consulted her about it, asked her advice. Bloomberg's had always put out a cheap line of footwear. Now they were planning a new departure, an expensive shoe which would have to be sold to a different kind of customer. The advertising appeal would have to be less showy, more convincing.

Myra was flattered by his serious deference to her opinion. She worked very hard over the plans for the new publicity. She always worked hard for him; he had the faculty of keeping his employees on tip-toe. But now she voluntarily put in a considerable amount of overtime. He said nothing about it, but she knew that he observed it. Nothing escaped his attention.

One evening in late September, he came to her house, driving up in his great blue car. He

wanted to ask her about some detail which he was afraid they had overlooked in the copy which had gone to the printer that day. Myra took him into the living room, where her mother and father were reading their favorite sections of the newspaper, her father deep in the politics of the news section, her mother pondering the recipes and the dress patterns on the woman's page.

John Peterson, who had been Jan Petrowski, treated them with an odd mixture of patronage and respect. He patronized them because he knew they were failures, commercially speaking. He respected them because he realized that they had something—an intangible, indefinite something—which had a value. They were old-stock Americans; theirs were the ideals and the traditions on which America was founded. He believed the ideals outworn, he was sure the traditions would soon be dead. But he knew that they were still strong enough to demand a certain lip service from the ambitious. Myra was conscious both of his patronage and his unwilling respect. She resented both equally and she was glad when he left.

After that, he began to talk to her about personal things during such unbusy moments as might occur in the office routine. He asked her questions about her youth, about her mother and father and her brothers. He told her about his own boyhood; stories of the days when his parents came to America as immigrants, bringing him a baby-in-arms; stories of the later days, after his father had been crushed under a huge truck because he could not understand English and had been confused by the shouts of the truck driver. His mother, alone and terrified in a strange land, had somehow procured work and although he was so little that he could barely toddle about the room, she had left him alone each day to get through the long hours as best he could. A good-natured Italian neighbor had "kept an eye on him" and sometimes some of the older children in the tenement would take him out on the sidewalks with them, but they had so many small brothers and sisters of their own, they could not be bothered with him too often.

Finally he had grown big enough to run on the streets himself, and sometimes when his mother

had not been able to buy enough for them to eat, and he was hungry, he would peer into the open garbage cans and thrust in his small, grimy fist for a piece of stale bread or an over-ripe banana. He had begun to make money early by selling newspapers and doing odd jobs. After the truant officers had caught him and put him in school, he had still worked in the afternoons and his small earnings had at least added enough to his mother's wages to give them enough food. He had been fifteen when his mother died, but by that time they had saved enough between them to start a little news stand, where they sold papers and magazines and also cheap candies and chewing gum. He liked to remember that his mother had had a silk dress to be buried in. She had always wanted a silk dress; it had been her conception of being an American lady.

Myra listened to his stories with horror, rather than sympathy. It made her cold all over to think of the dirt and the hideous smells and sights and sounds which had surrounded his childhood. But she could not feel any real sympathy, when she saw him sitting before her so sleek and prosperous

and satisfied. She felt that a spirit which could remain sleek through all that, could not really have suffered.

One afternoon, when she had worked late and, standing before the little mirror she had hung on the back of the door, was lifting tired arms to put on her hat, he came up behind her and suddenly caught her to him in a hard, crushing embrace. She closed her eyes but she could not shut out the feel of his full, red lips on her forehead, her throat, her lips. . . . She tried to push him away but she had scant strength to pit against his sturdiness. She felt sick but she could not cry out; she could only moan until she began to cry, small, gasping cries. Then, at last, he released her. He took out his handkerchief and began to wipe the tears from her cheeks gently enough. But he did not understand her terror or its cause.

"Why, it's all right. It's all right, Myra, I'm going to marry you," he said with royal assurance.

Myra looked at him, her eyes cold with distaste. She laughed harshly.

"Oh, no, you are not," she said and went out of the room.

Still he did not understand. He thought it was a shy modesty which took fright at his ardor, a part of that cool virginity which in girls of English descent seemed to persist for so many years after they reached maturity. He decided that he would have to go about his courtship a little differently, but he never thought of abandoning it.

Every day he brought some kind of pressure to bear. He talked to her of his ambitions; he told her that he was going to be a big man, a really big man. He would not stop short at Bloomberg's. Already he had made money by speculations in real estate. He brought his bank book to show her the record of his deposits. He brought a long list of his stock holdings. The total was breath-taking to Myra, who had never handled money in any larger quantities than a hundred dollars.

When he saw that he had made an impression on her, he pursued this line. He told her some of the things he planned to do when he should be "really rich." He talked about the big house he wanted, with broad estates about it; he talked of a special charity he wished to endow; he told

her of his plan for traveling over all the world; he said he might go into politics if the way opened—for he wanted to be a real American, a big American. And Myra knew that he was not showing her empty dreams and iridescent air castles. He was showing her the kingdoms which he could actually conquer with his shrewd common sense, his insensitive aggressiveness.

“Why do you want to marry me?” she asked him one day with cool curiosity.

He looked at her, his dark eyes narrowed shrewdly.

“Because you are very pretty, my dear, and because you are an American,” he told her, and she knew that he had told her the truth.

He wanted an American wife for his future—for the big house and the impressive world tour and the political career. Just as Americans had formerly gone abroad and bought European titles, now Europeans were coming to America and buying American names, she thought. The thought was bitter to the taste.

But she knew that she was yielding to his insistence. Life had benumbed her, somehow. She

no longer had the vitality to resist his constant pressure. When he became conscious of her shattered defenses, he thrust them finally aside with the assumption that everything was settled. He brought her an engagement ring, a wonderful diamond solitaire, four times as big as the one George Benton had given her.

She was surprised at the way her family took the engagement. She had expected them to disapprove of it. But in a shamefaced way they seemed pleased. Of course, it was a step-down to marry a foreigner, they admitted, but he was not like the ordinary "wops" and "polacks." He had made good. He was rich and would be richer. Her mother, especially, seemed to feel that a burden had been lifted by the prospect of money coming into the family not in dribblets but in a big, life-giving stream. Myra had not noticed before how tired and old her mother had grown.

John Peterson had countless small habits and mannerisms which grated on her. Their engagement was a piece of spiritual sandpaper perpetually rubbing against her nerves. He was open to suggestion about personal matters, but it

was so difficult a thing for her to make a suggestion. Once she told him about the diamond ring; told him that the better class American man did not wear flashy jewelry. Immediately he took the ring off and had the diamond put into a pin for her, a small bar pin in very good taste. She knew that he would take any such suggestions that she might make, but she could not bring herself to make them. Frank, personal criticism was outside her code. She discovered, though, that he was very quick to catch an indirect suggestion, and she succeeded through that method in modifying his crudeness to some extent. She told him a funny story which turned on the formula for introduction, "Meet Mr. So-and-So," and after she had told the story she never heard him use the formula again. She told him another story, an anecdote of a certain great English actor who had dismissed from his company a man who lifted his coat tails before taking his seat. After she told that story, she noticed that John Peterson did not fuss with his clothes so much. In many ways she could mold him.

But these were superficial things. Their great-

est maladjustment remained. He was an ardent lover.

When they were alone, his hands were always touching her, and he was given to passionate impulses when he would draw her suddenly to him with hot cruelty. She was not merely cold to his passion; she was repelled by it. But again he did not understand. He thought that this was her English virginity. After they were married, it would all be different. That was why he urged a quick marriage. He was always pressing her to marry him soon, to marry him *now*.

Christmas Eve found him still pleading. Why should they wait? What were they waiting for? He had plenty of money; he had already bought the house she liked. Christmas Eve was a half-holiday at Bloomberg's and she was going to the shops for some last-minute purchases. He drove her about in his big car, and when she had got all the holly and the ribbons and the tissue paper she needed, he took her home. Something was the matter with the engine; he stopped outside to fix it while Myra went indoors.

She found a package waiting for her on the

hall table. She took it into the living room and began to untie the string. The address was typed but when she saw the Washington postmark her heart began to beat thickly. Finally her fumbling hands opened the last wrapping.

It was a picture of the cherry blossoms, framed in cool, silver gray. A glimpse of blue water . . . a rim of faintly pink blossoms . . . the slim white Monument in the background. There was a card. Something was written on it in George's neat, small script.

"The blossoms will miss you next spring." That was all he had written.

She stared at the picture, forgetful of time and place and of her lover who would soon come into the room.

As she stared, a cool peace enveloped her. It was as though she had struggled to pass through a room filled with flame and smoke and suddenly a door had opened, letting in the air. She knew without any question that she must go through that door.

The cherry blossoms had always been a symbol to her. Now she knew the name of the thing they

symbolized. It was escape. She loved beauty not for itself but because it was an escape from reality. All that she really wanted of life was escape from life.

She could endure but she could not dare. Marriage with John Peterson, who had been Jan Petrowski, would hold shining gifts, but the price of the gifts was courage. She would have to fight her way to the very end, and she would need that hardest courage of all, the courage to conquer herself. With George Benton she would have no high moments, no shining gifts; their life would be a long, dull stretch of poverty—respectable, undistinguished poverty. But poverty only called for endurance and she knew how to endure. And then every spring she would have the cherry blossoms . . . annual renewal of illusion. Ah, illusion was the perfect escape from life! And George would never shatter her illusions, for he too sought escape.

She was still staring at the picture in her hands when her lover came in. He caught her to him and lifted her flushed, pretty face to his.

"When will you marry me?" he demanded.

Myra looked into his eyes, her own cool and unafraid.

"I am not going to marry you, John," she said.

This time he knew there was a difference. This time he knew she meant it. A dark, angry red crept up to his cheek bones, flooded his forehead. The veins in his temples throbbed angrily. She moved away from him, with her fastidious dislike for unleashed emotion.

"What d'you mean by that, Myra? Why aren't you going to marry me?"

"I am going back to Washington," she said, "where there are cherry blossoms in the spring-time."

REAL ESTATE

REAL ESTATE

The house next door was for sale. Mrs. Payne had watched from Father's window as the Norrises moved out. Father had wanted to know how many vans it took to move them, and whether they had crated their parlor furniture, and just how the piano had been moved out of the house. Father was too weak to get to the window himself, now, but he liked to know all the little things that happened in the neighborhood. She told him about the three "For Sale" signs that had been put up, two in the front windows and one pasted onto the house itself.

"I do hope nice people will buy it," she said for the hundredth time. "It is so important to have nice neighbors. The Norrises were such neat people. They were good neighbors, even if they were only renters."

"You'd better keep an eye out and see what kind of people come to look at the property," Father told her.

She thought his voice seemed weaker to-day.

She put her dry, shriveled palm on his forehead. It felt hot, she thought.

"I believe maybe we'd better have the doctor in," she said.

Father moved restlessly in the bed.

"I don't want the doctor," he said. "You are just as good a doctor as I need."

He smiled up at her.

They had been married forty years and they had the comfortable habit of affection. They had no children; there had been a son but he had died when he was still a baby and their bewildered grief for him had deepened their mutual dependence. Although there had never been another baby, she had continued to call her husband "Father."

"Well, I must be seeing about fresh towels for the roomers," she said with the crisp, cheerful voice she always had for Father. She bustled out of the room with housewifely briskness. Her sixty odd years sat lightly on her thin, wiry figure.

She got an armful of clean towels from the linen closet and began her methodical tour of the rooms. As she collected the soiled towels and

hung fresh ones on their white wooden racks, her quick eyes surveyed each room, making sure that the beds were smoothly made and the floors mopped and the furniture dusted. Since Father had been so bad and had needed so much attention, she had engaged a girl to come in every morning and "clean up," but she could never quite believe the work had been done until she had looked it over herself.

They had six roomers; that was the way they made their living. Every night, when she said her prayers, she thanked God that while Father could work they had saved enough to buy this house. Father had had a small clerkship in the Treasury Department and every year out of his salary they had managed to put by a little to reduce the mortgage, until after twenty-five years they owned it absolutely, free of all mortgages. They had chosen a house much larger than they actually needed, because Father had said that with a big house you could make your living but that a little house was only a luxury. Time had proved how wise he was. For time had brought his bad health which forced him to stop work

just two years before Congress passed the retirement bill, granting pensions to aged and infirm civil service employees. The bill was not retroactive and although Father had served the Government for forty-five years, he got no pension. But with their roomers, they managed very well. They only wanted simple things. The only real expense they had was Father's medicines and doctor's bills. But so far they had not had to go into debt. She and Father had always had a horror of debt.

In the afternoon, she brought her sewing into Father's room and pulled her rocker over by the window where she could keep one eye on the Norris house, in case any prospective purchasers should come to look at it.

About four o'clock, a big, low-hung touring car drew up at the Norris curb and a real estate agent got out. She knew he was a real estate agent because he was very dapper, and in Washington if a man is dapper, he is either a politician or a real estate agent. This one was too young to be a politician. She put down her sewing and tip-toed

out of the room, so as not to disturb Father who was taking his afternoon nap. She hurried down the steps and out to the pavement, where the young man was standing, looking up at the Norris house with a considering eye. His hat was pushed back on his head, a cigarette hung out of one corner of his mouth; there were certain hard, unyouthful lines about his eyes and his mouth. She approached him timidly; she was always timid with strangers. As she came up to him, he touched one hand to his hat brim but did not bother to lift the hat; he could see that she was poor and unimportant.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "but have you the sale of this house?"

"Yes."

The corners of her thin, pale lips turned up in a shy smile.

"Maybe you will think I'm a foolish old woman," she said, "but I just want to ask you please to sell to nice people. This has always been such a nice neighborhood. Most of the people on this block own their houses, you know? And it means so much to us to keep it this way. Especially to

me," she drew in her breath with a sudden sense of fear. "I make my living out of my house," she explained.

"Do you?" he asked. He regarded her with a sophisticated amusement, as one regards a child.

"Well, we'll try to do the best we can," he told her.

She felt vaguely disturbed, as she went back into her own house. Something about the young man's sophistication, something unreal in his soothing assurance, had alarmed her. But she decided to say nothing to Father about it.

Behind her back, the young man grinned broadly. "Queer old party," he thought, asking him to get her some "nice neighbors," the way a child might ask for candy. Rummy old soul! He brushed the thought of her out of the way. He had too many other things to think of just now, with his first wife clamoring for back alimony and his present wife piling up bridge debts. He must get hold of some money and get it damned soon.

When he had driven back to his office, he went to the telephone and gave a number.

"That you, Johnson?" Well, I think I've got what you want. Take you to look at it to-night, if that suits you. All right then. Eight o'clock sharp."

Father was not so well when he roused from his nap. She finally had to send for the doctor, after all.

"I think Mr. Payne ought to have a mild stimulant, regularly. Some good sherry," the doctor told her. "I'll give you a prescription for it, and I want him to have an egg in sherry, three times a day."

"How much will it cost for the sherry, doctor?" she faltered.

"Oh . . . I think you can get a fairly good sherry at the drug store for two or three dollars a pint," he said, with a large indifference to the size of a dollar.

She gasped. Their money for this month was almost exhausted now. But of course if Father needed the sherry, he must have it. That night she took the prescription to the drug store and had it filled. Before Father went to sleep he had

his first egg and sherry. It did seem to help him; she was sure he slept better afterwards.

Of course she did not see the "prospect" whom the young man brought to look at the next door house at eight o'clock. She was busy with Father and the doctor, and besides, even had she been idle, she could not have seen from her window into the dark. But two days later she noticed that the "For Sale" signs had been taken down and on the first day of the following month, she saw the big vans unloading furniture. Father wanted to know what the furniture looked like.

"I don't think much of it," she told him. "There's a great deal of red plush and the pictures are mostly crayons. There's a piano, though . . . and a phonograph . . . one of those expensive cabinet phonographs, much bigger than ours. But somehow I don't like it much." Her voice was dubious.

Then when the furniture was all unloaded and the men were taking it in, a big automobile drew up at the curb. Three children tumbled out and ran up the steps of the house as though they be-

longed there. They were followed by a fat woman and a man who smoked a big cigar.

She could not stop a gasp of horror, although she put her hand quickly to her mouth.

Father raised himself up on one elbow.

"What's the matter, May?" he asked anxiously.

Some instinct warned her, like a bell ringing inside of her. She must not upset Father; she must not let him know.

"It was an automobile . . . it almost ran over a child. But it's all right," she told him.

She must get out of the room, where she could think without letting Father see her thoughts. She made some excuse; she told him she had forgotten something downstairs in the kitchen.

Out in the hall, away from his eyes, she allowed despair and terror to flow over her in a great wave. For the people she had seen moving into the house next door were colored people. The dapper young man had sold the house to negroes. She knew what that meant for her property; she had some friends who had lived in a white neighborhood where negroes had "bought in" and she

knew that her friends had been forced to sell, at a sacrifice.

She put on her hat and coat and slipped out of the house, down to the corner drug store. The druggist was a friendly person and he always knew the neighborhood news. She told him what she had seen.

"Yes, I heard so," he told her. "They paid ten thousand cash for the house, I understand."

"Ten thousand cash!" she echoed. Her house had cost nine thousand and it had taken Father and herself over twenty years to buy it.

"They have a fine automobile too," she said. "They must have a heap of money. What is the man's business?"

The druggist laughed meaningly.

"It's the best paying business I know, right now," he said. "Living next door to him, you'll find out quick enough what his business is, Mrs. Payne," he added.

She said nothing to any of her roomers; she prayed that they would not mind, since they were only at home during the evenings and never saw

the neighbors. She made small, pathetic efforts to increase the attractiveness of their rooms, and even ran up fresh curtains for all the windows. She could only afford cheap scrim but she made the ruffled edges look very dainty. Father admired them extravagantly.

When a week had passed and none of the roomers had said anything, she began to breathe more freely. But at the end of the month, when Mr. Peters paid his room rent, he told her that he wanted to give a month's notice.

"The room is very nice, Mrs. Payne," he told her. "I've never had any complaints. But I prefer to live in a white neighborhood."

Mr. Peters had been with her for five years and he had never missed his payments, promptly on the last day of each month. His leaving was a serious thing, but she held onto her pride and did not let him see what a blow he had dealt her.

"I'm sorry," she said quietly.

She had to tell Father that Mr. Peters was leaving but she did not tell him the reason. She said Mr. Peters wanted to move to another neighborhood where he would be nearer some of

his friends. A day or so after that, Mr. Reinert notified her that he would be giving up his room too at the end of the month. She told Father that Mr. Reinert was leaving because Mr. Peters was going; they wanted rooms in the same house, she said. When Mrs. Woolcott and Miss Reavis also gave up their rooms, she did not know what to tell Father. She was bewildered and dazed by the sudden adversity. But Father thought of a reason himself. He said Mr. Peters had started a wave of restlessness; people often moved just to be moving, he thought.

But even though he had no suspicion of the reason for the sudden exodus, Father was upset and anxious. The rent from the rooms was their only income and they could not afford to have any vacancies. He fretted about it a good bit. She tried to sooth him; she said she would put up their old "Rooms for Rent" sign; she would put it up immediately and she was sure the rooms would not stay vacant any time at all. She did put up the sign but the few people who came to look at the rooms always saw the little colored children

playing in the front yard next door and after that they all made some excuse.

Father heard the voices of the children playing outside and was interested.

"Do they seem like nice children, May?" he asked. "How old are they?"

"Yes, very nice children, Father," she said. "I think they are about five and seven and ten years old—to look at them."

"We must make friends with them and have them in some day," he said, "If you get some peppermint sticks at the drug store, we can have a little party for them here in my room. I would like to see some children again . . . it has been so many years."

She caught her breath sharply.

"I think we'll have to wait until you are a little stronger, Father, before we can have children in," she told him. "They are noisy, even when they are good."

A great many automobiles drew up at the house next door, and men got out of the machines and

went indoors, to reappear after a time lugging heavy packages or big square wooden cases, which they carried off with them in the automobiles. Most of the machines were large, expensive cars and usually the chauffeurs went inside for the packages. She wondered about it.

The Misses Granger, who had her best room, had not yet given notice. But they were beginning to complain about the noise next door. They said they were certain there was a great deal of drinking over there. They could hear loud laughter and the clink of glass late into the night.

"And look at the empty bottles in the back yard, Mrs. Payne. Surely you have seen them?" asked the eldest Miss Granger.

Mrs. Payne had noticed how untidy the next door backyard was, with heaps of rubbish banked against the fence. Now she looked more closely and saw that there were scores of broken bottles among the débris—whiskey bottles without any doubt. Then she remembered the boxes that passed in and out and she remembered the words of the druggist—"Living next door, you'll find out what his business is quick enough." Suddenly

it all fit together in a pattern. Her next door neighbor was a bootlegger. That was how he made his money; that was the reason he could pay ten thousand cash for the house; that was the reason he could afford the best phonographs and the highest priced automobiles.

But this knowledge brought a certain hope. She thought she could see a possible solution for her difficulties. If the man were a bootlegger, he could be reported, arrested, locked up in jail. Thus shut off from his source of income, he might be unable to afford the house any longer. His family might move away and resell the house. Things might all straighten out again.

She watched for a quiet time, when Father should be taking a nap; and then she telephoned to the police department.

They sent three plain clothes men up to see her; two fat, important Irishmen and one Jew, small and friendly. She took them to her back windows and showed them the bottles; she told them about the automobiles that drove up so constantly and the wooden cases which were taken in and out of the house. The fattest of the three

policemen seemed to be the leader. He shrugged his shoulders at her evidence.

"We'd have to have a tighter case than that," he said.

Then he began to ask her questions. He cross-examined her as if she were suspected of something too. Finally the three of them went over to the next house. She watched at her window for a long time. When they came out, all of them were smoking long, black cigars. They seemed on the friendliest terms with the man who came with them to the door and they all laughed loudly at something he said. Then they went out to their car, which was waiting at the curb. But the third man, the little Jew, hesitated, said something to the others and came back to Mrs. Payne.

He came into the entrance hall and pulled the door half shut behind him. He talked to her in a kindly way, with an ingratiating upward inflection at the end of each sentence.

"I'm leaving the force to-morrow myself, so I don't mind giving you a tip, see?" he said. "You won't get anywhere, lady, by reporting that coon next door, you understand? He showed us his list

of customers and he's got two Cabinet officers and Congressman Saxon on the list, d'you get me?"

She did not "get him." She was naïvely puzzled. How could a bootlegger, a law-breaker, have the names of high Government officials on a list which he would show the police? She could not understand it at all. But she did understand that the police were not going to do anything. She could "get" that much. Her small hope, that had flared so brightly, died to ashes.

That night the doctor asked her if she were keeping up the egg and sherry prescription for Father, and she admitted that the sherry had given out three days before.

"But you should have told me, Mrs. Payne. Your husband needs a stimulant; it is very wrong that he should have been without it for three days."

She twisted her thin hands nervously and looked up at him with distressed fear in her eyes.

"Doctor," she faltered, "isn't there some other stimulant . . . something that wouldn't cost quite so much?"

The physician frowned. His practise was for

the most part among the rich and the comfortably-off; he was not used to having his prescriptions questioned.

"This is no time to consider relative costs," he told her. "Mr. Payne's vitality is extremely low and if you do not follow my instructions, I cannot be responsible for the outcome."

"Oh, sir, I'll get it. I'll get it to-day," she assured him and took the fresh prescription he handed her.

There was only one thing to do. She would have to borrow some money. She could get it from Father's old friend, Jeremiah Todd. And of course Father must never know; Father hated debt. But with all her roomers gone except the Misses Granger, and no new roomers coming in, she was not taking in enough money to pay for their food, much less for Father's prescriptions. There was nothing to do but borrow.

They became accustomed to noisy nights, with the advent of the new neighbors. Even Father, who was growing a little deaf, could hear enough to decide that they must be "a pretty gay lot." But one night it was much worse than usual.

They were awakened by loud, angry shouts, cursing, finally a pistol shot.

She turned on the lights and got out of bed. Her face was as white as the old-fashioned nightgown that she wore buttoned to her throat. But she kept her eyes brave and comforting for Father. She sat up until the noise had quieted down again. Father wanted her to telephone for the police but she would not do it.

"They would not do anything," she said dully.

"Why of course they would do something, May," Father protested. "What makes you think they wouldn't?"

"The man next door is a—a friend of two Cabinet officers," she said.

"Well, that won't keep the police from stopping disorder of this kind," Father reasoned with her.

But she only shook her head, and would not telephone. "No, they wouldn't do anything," she kept saying.

Next morning, the eldest Miss Granger gave notice.

"After last night, we couldn't possibly stay, Mrs. Payne," Miss Granger said, "and I'll give you the check now, paying up for the month, so that we can leave as soon as we can find another place. My sister is terrified; I do not wish her to experience such a night again."

Mrs. Payne's pride had broken. She could not conceal her feelings now, as she had when Mr. Peters left. Tears welled into her tired eyes. Miss Granger saw the tears.

"I'm sorry to leave you, Mrs. Payne. You have been very kind always. But of course we can't stay in a disorderly neighborhood," she finished with righteous indignation.

The Misses Granger needed a deal of help with their packing and with their final exodus. She had always had to wait on them more than on the other roomers, and up to the very end she tried to make things comfortable for them. On the day they moved out, there was much running up and down steps and banging of heavy trunks, so she could never be certain that Father had not rung the bell which was always placed close to his hand for him to ring when he needed her.

He might have rung it and she might not have heard. Or he might have been too weak to ring. When the Misses Granger finally departed, and she hurried up to Father, she found him lying still and white, with a half-smile at one corner of his mouth. She put her head to his breast but she could hear no heart beat . . . touched his wrist but there was no pulse. . . . Terrified, she ran to the telephone and called the doctor. When he came, he told her that Father had been dead for an hour or more.

She stayed alone in the house all night. There were friends she might have notified, but she did not want them. She wanted to sit by Father and tell him why she had not heard his bell ring, if it had rung. It seemed to her that his spirit was still close enough to understand what she said.

Father had carried a little insurance. After the doctor's bills were settled and the funeral expenses were met, and she had paid back the money she had been obliged to borrow, there was still two thousand dollars of insurance. She realized that she would have to sell her house, since she could no longer make a living from it. She went

to a real estate office. The young man who talked with her was a counterpart of the dapper young man who had sold the house next door. He might almost have been the same one. She told him that she wanted to sell as quickly as possible.

"How much?" he asked laconically.

"Well the house next to mine sold recently for ten thousand dollars," she answered.

The young man smiled superciliously.

"You couldn't get that now," he told her. "Property has been dumped on the market all along that block, since it is no longer a white neighborhood."

She knew that what he said was true; up and down the block the houses were plastered with "For Sale" signs.

"But can't you sell my house to colored people, rich colored people like the ones who bought next door to me?" she urged.

"It's only the first house that they pay high for. After that they can buy in cheaply," he explained.

"Well, do the best you can," she finally said. She was so very tired.

The best he could do was seventy-five hundred,

fifteen hundred less than it would have brought a year before. But she took it. She had to take it. Then, by adding her insurance money, she was able to buy another house in a neighborhood which seemed safe. She would never feel safe again, though.

The new house was nothing like so nice as the old one. The rooms were narrow and dark and it was hard to arrange her old-fashioned, heavy furniture in them. It would be just a house, anyway; it could never be home to her.

For ten days she worked, polishing, scrubbing, re-arranging, before she got the new house in order. She did not move as briskly as she used to, and she missed Father's help. Father, even when he had been too sick to do anything himself, could always help by encouraging and suggesting. It took much longer to do things now that there was no one to be interested in them after they were done. But by the end of the tenth day everything was finished. The last ruffled curtain had been hung, and she had put the neat "Rooms for Rent" sign in her front window. She eased her tired body into her accustomed rocker, and un-

folded the evening paper. She was not much interested in newspapers but she had formed the habit of reading them because Father had loved to have her read them aloud to him. And there was nothing else to do now but read.

On the first page her eye was caught by a headline,

SAXON UPHOLDS LAW

REPRESENTATIVE SAXON

DEFENDS PROHIBITION

Says American Homes and American
Women Must Be Protected

REMNANT

REMNANT

Miss Maria Welbon belongs to an almost vanished race. She is a Washington "cave-dweller"; one of the few surviving members of that old residential set which disdained all contact with transient politicians and was blind to the social existence of uncultured millionaires who "wintered" in Washington. For years, by their very arrogance, these exclusive "residents" enforced their social decrees, and in the old days many a millionaire's wife retreated from the battle, forced to fall back to the less difficult territory of New York. But in the end the barbarians won. The sons of the millionaires carried off the fairest daughters of the defenders and even the despised politicians broke through the lines.

When Miss Maria was young, the defenses still held. In the 'eighties, when she had her coming-out party, she could be complacently sure that she was introduced to the "best people." Social life had integrity then.

It was a little hard, financially, to manage her first season. Her father had died some years before and had left his widow a quite modest annuity. But Mrs. Welbon was a competent woman. In a later era she would have been known as a "good executive"; she would have presided over many women's clubs. In the 'eighties her efficiency was concentrated on getting two dollars of results from one dollar's expenditure. She had managed so well that they were able to keep a small, tidy brougham that first season, and Maria drove to all her luncheons and teas and cotillions in proper style. Mrs. Welbon also managed one or two parties at which Maria could be hostess. They were nothing like so lavish as the parties given by the other debutantes, but every one was glad to come. Maria was a Welbon, and no one would think of refusing a party given by a Welbon.

Miss Maria still has the photograph of herself which was taken during her "coming-out" winter. It has a shiny, glazed finish, and shows her leaning one elbow on the back of a large plush chair, her head tilted a bit to one side, the chin supported

by her hand. She wore a stiff silk, with puffed sleeves and a tight, smooth bodice. Her hair was cut in bangs in front and drawn into a smooth knot in the back. Even now, faded as it is, the picture shows a certain prettiness in the round, credulous eyes, the straight, short nose, the gentle mouth. But a vague prettiness. Little to arrest the masculine eye, one would say.

She was not a wall flower. But neither was she a belle. At the cotillions she got a respectable number of favors, and all the young gallants were punctilious about paying their "party calls" at her house. One or two of them even invited her to the play. Those were gala nights! The clatter of two-horse carriages at the door, and her mother, stately and gracious, going ahead on the deferential arm of the escort while she followed close behind, all aflutter, holding her delicate froth of skirts close to her, so that no speck of dust from the carriage wheel should soil them. The bumpy drive over cobbled streets, while her mother asked the young man about his mother and his Aunt Susan and his Uncle Timothy. Then the play itself . . . the delight of recognizing

one's friends in the audience . . . her mother's cool, dignified bows, bestowed sparingly . . . the little shiver of delight she always felt as the lights went out and the drama began to unfold itself on the bright stage . . . the circumspect thrill of an occasional contact with the young man on her right . . . the sobering consciousness of her mother's stately presence on her left. Ah, there were chaperones in those days.

But none of the young men she met paid her anything but discreet, friendly attentions. She might never have had a beau at all, if she had not gone to Mrs. Preston's big New Year's reception. She almost missed going, because Mrs. Welbon had been prostrated with a headache all the forenoon and in the afternoon she still lay, moaning, in her big fourposter with the curtains drawn to keep out all light. She was quite uncertain about letting Maria go to the reception alone.

"Mary Preston takes up such queer people," she said. "Her parties are so frightfully mixed. I hardly know about your going without me."

But Maria begged to go. It was so lonesome, staying home on New Year's when one had no callers.

Maria so seldom begged for anything that her mother weakened. It *was* a mixed party and a dreadful crush into the bargain. The Preston home, a huge, old-fashioned place in Georgetown, was positively crammed with guests. Mrs. Welbon would have called it a "mob" and would have come away very promptly after paying her respects to her hostess. But Maria was not competent and positive. She pushed her way inexpertly through the crowd, stopping here and there for a breathless word of greeting, when she found a friend. Finally she got caught in a jam, between the library and the dining room. The people about her all seemed to be immensely tall, so that she felt as though the air were shut off from her. Some one stepped on her instep and she moaned a little with the pain of it.

"Do you feel faint?" asked a voice far above her.

She pushed her hat back a little and tilted her face to her questioner.

"No," she said, "but if I don't get out of this, I'm afraid I may."

A large, firm hand seized her elbow and a large, firm body shouldered a way for her through the jam. He found a breathing space for her over in one corner of the dining-room, and a seat on a small sofa that had been pushed into the corner.

"I'll get you something cool," he said.

While he was gone, she straightened her hat and smoothed the ribbons on her dress. When he came back, bringing her an ice and some small cakes, she smiled up into his eyes.

"You have been very kind to me," she said primly.

An embarrassed flush spread over his homely face, up to his untamed, straw-colored hair.

"I'm glad I could be of some use. I'm not much of an ornament at a party," he said with shy deprecation.

His shyness made her quite bold. She patted the empty seat beside her.

"Get yourself an ice and eat it here with me," she suggested.

He was not at all like the men she was used

to; he had not their facility in warding off silence with small talk. Evidently he would have been quite content to sit beside her and eat his ice without saying anything. Finally she asked him if he lived in Washington, and he told her that he was living here for a term of years. He was a Congressman, he said. From Kansas.

She knew then that she should extricate herself from the acquaintance. For she knew that to her mother, and to her mother's friends, Kansas was nothing but an ugly name on the map. They did not believe that civilization in its finer forms extended beyond the thirteen original States. They conceded to western congressmen no possible social existence.

But he looked at her with such admiration in his shy regard that it made a little warm feeling in her heart. Other men had not accorded her anything but casual respect. It was rather nice to feel that a man thought her attractive, even a Congressman from Kansas. She sat on the sofa with him until quite late in the afternoon and then she let him walk home with her. It had turned very cold and a fine, dry snow was filter-

ing through the air. He put his big hand under her elbow to guide her through the stormy dusk. They laughed a good bit, without much cause, as children laugh in the snow. She was glad that she had not ordered the brougham to come for her.

A week or so later, he unexpectedly called upon her at her house. Evidently he did not know that he should first have secured her permission. Her mother was amazed and frigidly courteous, but fortunately other guests at the time kept her occupied. Under her mother's cold wonder, Maria was nervous, and he too retreated into his characteristic shyness. The whole visit was awkward and the aftermath most distressing. Her mother did not mince matters. She was shocked, she said, that a daughter of hers should admit a person of this kind to her friendship. There was something almost *common* about it. She could only account for it by a certain great-grandmother on Mr. Welbon's side!

He came to the house again, this time to bring some tickets he had bought for a very special concert. It had seemed to him a nice courtesy to pay

her mother. Mrs. Welbon was out, making calls, when he came and Maria received him alone in their small drawing-room which was so overcrowded with fine old mahogany. After a while he suggested that they go out for a walk and, feeling very guilty, she agreed. Out in the air she somehow managed to forget her mother and it was like that first walk with him, jolly and young and free. Then, when they were coming home, he suddenly drew a deep breath and asked her to marry him. No preparation, no formality! She supposed it was being a westerner that made him so direct, so sure of what he wanted. How could he be sure that he wanted to marry her, when he had only seen her three times? She asked him that.

"Why, I knew that the first day," he told her.

It gave her a distinct thrill. It was really quite wonderful to have a man fall in love with you so startlingly. She felt warm and happy. Then she remembered. Of course, she could never, never marry him.

She tried to tell him, but she was so upset that her "no" was not very definite.

Her mother made it very definite, though, in the interview he had with her later. He expected Maria to stand with him, against her mother. He did not understand her. She had never stood against her mother and she did not have the strength to oppose the standards and traditions of her own people. She cried a great deal but she gave him up. Her mother sent her to Baltimore to stay with some cousins there for the rest of the season.

He never came to see her again. And she never had any other offers of marriage. Her mother could not afford to give her another season as expensive as this one. In the next few years most of the girls who had "come out" when she did, got married, and gradually she slipped out of the younger set. She only went to the big teas and the general receptions now, with her mother.

She interested herself in church work. She was always in her place in the family pew at St. Jude's on all the Saints' days and twice on Sundays. She sewed for the poor and made beautiful embroidered things for church bazaars.

Life settled into a middle-aged groove and

hardened there. As the years passed there was nothing to mark their going save her mother's failing health and increasing querulousness. Mrs. Welbon resented the innovations of modern life; she resented the changes in the social customs of the Capital City. The newspapers were filled, now, with descriptions of "brilliant" parties given by persons whose very names were unknown to her. She impressed upon her daughter that the "real" people did not have their names in the paper. Only the newly rich, she said, would submit their guests to the indignity of being listed in a newspaper column as "among those present." Miss Maria was puzzled by the fact that so often she saw the names of their own friends in just such lists. But she did not question her mother's dictum. She accepted her mother's explanation that it all came from "letting down the social bars."

Their small income seemed to grow smaller with the years, and with the diminished purchasing power of the dollar. Finally they had to sell the old home and move into an apartment. Their heavy furniture looked queer in the little, low-

pitched rooms. Much of it they had to dispose of. They sold it to some of their more prosperous relatives; they could have gotten better prices from an antique dealer but Mrs. Welbon would not allow it to go out of the family.

After they moved into the apartment, they had to give up the two big teas they had been giving each year. They had a "day at home" engraved on their cards now. And every Monday of the season they had tea and cakes for the friends who dropped in. These were usually Mrs. Welbon's friends. Miss Maria's contemporaries were busy with growing families or expanding interests and had little time for looking up some one who was pretty definitely "out of things." Mrs. Welbon said the young people had lost all talent for leisure; to her, Miss Maria's generation always remained "the young people."

In the beginning of the twentieth century, when Miss Maria was over forty years old, Mrs. Welbon died. After this, Miss Maria's life became a little dusty and shapeless, like a garment that has slipped from its hook and lies neglected on the closet floor.

Of course, during her mourning period, she could not have any days "at home," and the people who had been accustomed to drop in for a cup of tea on Monday's got out of that habit. She was alone a great deal now, and began to talk to herself. Even as she walked along the street, her lips would move. Her life had always been filled with her mother's opinions. They had been sturdy, robust opinions and had taken up much mental room. Now she lived with the echoes, the memories of her mother's opinions. It was like living with ghosts. There was so much empty space in one's mind, with nothing to fill it save these shadowy thoughts. The same thoughts over and over, about the same things.

Until her two years' mourning was over she went nowhere except to meetings of the Woman's Auxiliary, where she helped to pack the boxes which were sent to the poorer clergy. After the two years, when she lightened her mourning, she resumed her attendance at meetings of the Colonial Dames; and occasionally she would be asked to a tea or an at-home. She wore her mother's ornaments now; there was a cameo pin

and a pearl brooch and a gold cross set with amethysts. She ripped some of the jet trimmings off her mother's best dress and sewed it on her own black satin. At the teas, the pretty young girls who helped serve always took her for an old lady and were sweetly solicitous. She felt vaguely resentful about this, because her contemporaries were not treated as old ladies. She thought it was the unsuitable clothes these others wore which deceived people into thinking them younger than they were. They came to parties dressed like their own daughters, in bright colors, and with gay flowers and feathers on their hats. They were erasing the definite lines which had once divided the generations, just as they had allowed the line between propriety and impropriety to become blurred, just as they had let down the barriers which had protected the old residents from the outlanders. As her mother had said, all the standards were being lowered in a general surrender.

She was confused by the din of modernity. Even to cross the street had become a perilous adventure, with all the whirling traffic, the hide-

ous blare of horns in one's ear. And she could not follow people's conversation easily; they talked of so many new things with such casual rapidity.

The war was a vague nightmare, of which she was never able to make head or tail. She only knew that the confusion was greater than ever; and that one was expected to report every day at Red Cross headquarters and make endless bandages; and that the streets were filled with strange people such as Washington had never known before; and that everybody said old Washington was dead now. She had seen it dying for so long that perhaps she was less shocked than some of her friends who had been less faithful to it.

One very definite reality emerged from this unreality of war. Something very terrible had happened to fixed incomes. Even her prosperous friends complained of their "poverty." Her own small inheritance shrank pitifully. She had to give up the apartment and move into one very cramped room. Of course, she had to sell the furniture. She cried a good bit over that. The

people who sublet the apartment offered her a surprising price for the furniture, and she sold it to them instead of to the cousins who had bought the first lot. She felt guilty about it, as though she had betrayed her mother's standards. But she needed the money so badly.

She had to watch every penny now. She turned her old dresses and relined her old bonnets with scraps which she found in an old trunk of her mother's. She ate milk and crackers in her room for breakfast and for lunch and sometimes even for dinner. But she managed to scrape together enough to pay for her seat at St. Jude's and to meet her Colonial Dames' dues. Even when the war was over, things did not ease up much, financially, she found.

One Sunday, when she rose from her knees after the hurried prayer she always said upon entering the church, she noticed two strangers being shown into the pew ahead. The people to whom the pew belonged were spending the winter abroad, and strangers occupied it each Sunday now. Miss Maria would never have noticed ex-

cept . . . She would have known his face anywhere, even though its lean ruggedness had grown into a fat importance and its embarrassed diffidence had become an assured pomposity. No woman ever quite forgets the face of a lover, though she may have had a legion of them. When she has had only one. . . . Miss Maria panted a little and her pale face was red. Little beads of perspiration came out on her thin upperlip.

She had known he was in Washington; she had read about him in the newspaper. The President had appointed him on some important commission and the social columns were filled with entertainments which were given for his wife. Of course this woman with him was his wife. Miss Maria examined her furtively. She was not a Church-woman, Miss Maria thought, because she did not kneel and pray before the Service; she sat erect and looked composedly about her. She wore a very smart little turban of purple velvet, which fit down closely on her marceled gray hair; and a wonderful cloak of mole fur, soft and lustrous. Fingering her own feather boa, a boa which had

belonged to her mother and which was skimpy and shabby now, Miss Maria knew a moment of burning envy. All that this woman had might have been *hers*, if only . . . She checked the thought. How wicked she was to think such things, and in Church too. In the general confession, she repeated very fervently "And we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and there is no help in us."

Once during the singing of a hymn he turned his head and looked back. Miss Maria experienced a shivering thrill. But he did not recognize her. She caught her breath again, with mingled relief and disappointment.

The sermon began. The rector was a new incumbent, who was spending a superb vitality in a straining effort to lift the dead weight of Washington's intellectual inertia. He talked of life as though it were a reality, and not a bloodless tale in a stupid book. He talked of Christianity as though it were a thing of joy and courage and tolerance and love, instead of a cold, proud rectitude. He pleaded with his hearers to answer "yes" to life; he even told them that the reality

of sin lay not in weakness of the flesh but in poverty of spirit.

In another city, people would have stood in line to hear him. But in Washington, a city which only marks time for life and never lives, such departure from the platitudes must be frustrate. Vague inattention, puzzled inability to understand, cold disapproval—he spoke to these; he could not even strike the live spark of opposition. Enormous energy poured into a vacuum.

Miss Maria read her prayer book while he preached. The old pew holders, the “real St. Jude’s people” formed that section of his congregation which coldly disapproved, and she belonged to that section. As a matter of fact, she could not understand what he said; she only felt vaguely disturbed by him; just as she had always been vaguely disturbed by life. But the people whose judgment she trusted had told her that he was not orthodox, and so when he talked she took refuge in the unchallenged orthodoxy of the psalms.

“Oh, God, the heathen are come into thine in-

heritance; thy holy temple have they defiled, and made Jerusalem an heap of stones," she read.

It almost seemed to her that the psalmist had had her case in mind. For here, in old St. Jude's, which for generations had been the temple to which her people "went up," even here were the invaders flaunting their purple velvet and their mole coats! . . . Hastily she reminded herself that she must not again fall into the sin of covetousness. Had she not confessed and been absolved? She must not sin again. Instead of the weakness of envy, she must know the strength of pride. Pride that she had kept the faith. Pride that, whatever others had done, she had not lowered the standards of the class into which she had been born. She might have had all the luxury and the ease which belonged to the woman seated before her. But to get it she must have compromised with her traditions.

"The congregations of the ungodly have robbed me: but I have not forgotten thy law," she read, and was comforted.

Service was over, but Miss Maria tarried be-

side the church door to greet her friends. She looked near-sightedly about, for a familiar face. A high, incisive voice called her name.

"Good morning, Maria," the voice said, and a bony, black-gloved hand touched her on the arm.

It was her mother's old friend, Mrs. Armistead. She was eighty years old but her sharp black eyes still snapped at life, and her sharp tongue still terrorized her acquaintances. The Armistead fortune had grown with the years, instead of vanishing like the Welbon money; and the dowager of the family retained her arrogance. There was a touch of patronage in her recognition of Miss Maria. Not because Miss Maria was poor. While no one knew better than did Mrs. Armistead the power of money, still it suited her purposes to cling to the old tradition of breeding. But no tradition could give her anything but contempt for stupidity, and she knew that Maria was stupid.

She kept her hand on Miss Maria's arm as she talked, but her keen eyes looked everywhere, picking out the faces she knew in the emerging congregation.

"Who were those people in the pew ahead of you, Maria?" she asked. "I never saw them before. But the church is filled with unknowns now."

Miss Maria found herself flushing. She tried to answer but the name—the name of her only lover—would not speak itself.

Finally, "I don't . . . don't know," she said. It was the first lie she had ever told.

But Mrs. Armistead did not see her confusion. She never really saw Miss Maria; she only used her as a sort of speaking tube.

"The sermon was outrageous. Perfectly outrageous," she went on speaking, through Miss Maria. "I can't think how that man ever got a call to St. Jude's. But probably he's no worse than most. None of them are doctrinally sound, these days. Well, Maria, we might as well recognize it. Your dear mother knew it before she died. We are done for. It's a new world. A world with no standards. Heresy in the pulpit and rich nobodies in the pews! We are done for, we conservatives."

"No. No." There was something almost pas-

sionate in Miss Maria's negative. Mrs. Armistead looked at her; really looked at her for the first time in years.

"No," Miss Maria reiterated. Color had crept into her gray cheeks and her eyes flashed.

"They have taken everything from us," she almost sobbed, "but they can't, they *can't* take away our aristocracy or our Apostolic succession."

With her head held high, she walked firmly away, forgetting even to say good-by to Mrs. Armistead. As she went, a sudden gust of wind caught up one end of the shabby feather boa and flung it out from her shoulder like a banner.

THE END

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